

Campus Activism in the Digital Age: An Ecological Chronology of #Concernedstudent1950

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This essay builds an ecological chronology of student-led activism at the University of Missouri (in autumn, 2015), illustrating how advocates make sense of and advance the rhetorical action of which they are a part via social media. Through a critical-qualitative immersion in the social media network of various participants, we follow three phases of advocacy: publicizing personal experiences of racism; expanding political consciousness through #ConcernedStudent1950; and the ecology's growth into a national antagonism pitting "free speech" against anti-racist activism. We conclude that by encouraging the campus community to hold MU administrators accountable, student activists achieved tangible outcomes, with potentialities for MU and other communities.

Keywords: Media ecology, student protest, social media, social movements, digital activism

On August 9, 2014, protests erupted in Ferguson, Missouri. A day earlier, White officer Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown, an 18-year old Black man who had been walking with a friend.¹ Across the US, hashtags like #Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter became "ciphers for national debates about American racism, police profiling and brutality, militarized responses to civil unrest, government corruption and criminal justice reform."² A two-hour drive west at the University of Missouri (hereafter, Mizzou or MU), three students created MU4MikeBrown, a collective "demanding justice for black and brown bodies" through campus marches, poetry readings, a die-in, and hashtags like #ourlivesmatter.³⁻⁴ MU4MikeBrown members' experiences steered them for

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¹BBC News, "Ferguson Unrest: From Shooting to Nationwide Protests," *BBC News*, August 10, 2015, sec. US & Canada, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-30193354>.

²Sarah J Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, "#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks," *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016): 397.

³Ashley Jost, "Culture Shock: Students Push to Shake up Ideas about Race on MU Campus," *Columbia Tribune*, March 22, 2015, <http://www.columbiatribune.com/1a41389b-2444-52df-9541-91a1ef43d28f.html>.

⁴Along with #Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter, CS1950 was influenced by The Irate 8—a group formed at the University of Cincinnati in response to the murder of unarmed Samuel Dubose by a campus police officer in August, 2015 (The Irate 8, n.d.).

what was to unfold in fall, 2015: the coalescence of a new activist group, introduced first as #ConcernedStudent1950 (hereafter, CS1950), and three months of activism that did more than just “go viral.” CS1950’s work achieved demonstrable local effects, notably, the resignation of MU System President Tim Wolfe,⁵ and inspired solidarity protests for administrative accountability nationwide,⁶ while rippling into an antagonism between antiracist activists and advocates of “free speech” that has continued on college campuses since.⁷

Scholars have approached the 2015 MU protests as a case study in failed leadership⁸ and in relationship to ethical representation in photojournalism.⁹ We are interested in activism led by CS1950 as an example of consequential rhetoric. The increasing prevalence of “hashtag activism” has generated excitement among many scholars, while also leading to skepticism among some, who ask whether socially mediated movements are indeed vehicles of effective activism or merely representations of algorithms or superficial collectives.¹⁰ This essay addresses both enthusiasts and skeptics by posing a prior question: What traits distinguish *consequential* activism? Rather than defining consequential activism in terms of mobilizing resources effectively (as did past movements), or using rhetoric to meet functions for a movement, consequential activism follows the formation of collective identity. A group’s actions serve not only to advance the external changes that the group seeks, but, at the same time, define the group’s identity for the members themselves, such that any number of actions become evidence of a collective’s existence as they defined it. #ConcernedStudent1950 recursively created and represented campus activism through a narrative of concerned students holding their administration/institution accountable. Our detailed exploration of CS1950 suggests that social media helps advocates make sense of and advance the communicative action of which they are a part as it is unfolding, thus enabling them to form a collective identity capable of consequential action.

Our methods reflect recent calls for greater complexity in research on social media’s place in social movement.¹¹ Guided by critical digital methods, we follow the organic growth of a collective identity network to “recognize changes, unfoldings, and subversions.”¹² We first review scholarship on social movement and social media, focusing on recent ecological concepts that help us

⁵Matt Pearce, “Hunger Striker Gives Credit to Fellow Activists Fighting Racism at University of Missouri,” *LA Times*, November 10, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-missouri-hunger-striker-20151110-story.html>.

⁶Becca Andrews and Madison Pauly, “Campus Protests Are Spreading like Wildfire,” *Mother Jones* (blog), November 19, 2015, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/11/missouri-student-protests-racism/>.

⁷Stephanie Lecci, “Racial Slurs Force Mizzou to Address Continuing Problems, a Year after Protests,” September 28, 2016, <http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/racial-slurs-force-mizzou-address-continuing-problems-year-after-protests>; Katy Steinmetz, “The Fight Over Free Speech on Campus Isn’t Just About Free Speech,” *Time*, October 12, 2017, <http://time.com/4979235/the-campus-culture-wars/>.

⁸John A Fortunato, Ralph A Gigliotti, and Brent D Ruben, “Racial Incidents at the University of Missouri: The Value of Leadership Communication and Stakeholder Relationships,” *International Journal of Business Communication* 54, no. 2 (2017): 199–209.

⁹TJ Thomson, “Black, White, and a Whole Lot of Gray: How White Photojournalists Covered Race during the 2015 Protests at Mizzou,” *Visual Communication Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2016): 223–33.

¹⁰Jenn Fang, “In Defense of Hashtag Activism,” *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs* 2, no. 1 (2015): 10; Dan Mercea, Laura Iannelli, and Brian D Loader, “Protest Communication Ecologies,” *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2015): 279–289.

¹¹Christina R. Foust and Kate Drazner Hoyt, “Social Movement 2.0: Integrating and Assessing Scholarship on Social Media and Movement,” *Review of Communication* 18, no. 1 (2018): 37–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2017.1411970>.

¹²Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (Sage, 2017), 289; Emiliano Treré and Alice Mattoni, “Media Ecologies and Protest Movements: Main Perspectives and Key Lessons,” *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016): 290–306.

to appreciate agency, rhetoric, and change. We then develop a detailed chronology of key moments in the Mizzou protests, following three phases: publicizing personal experiences with racism; expanding political consciousness through #ConcernedStudent1950; and outgrowing the immediacy of campus. We conclude by offering insights into social media's place in growing a collective identity and into the implications of the events following CS1950's successful push to remove Wolfe, noting how the events of early November, 2015, thrust student activists and allied faculty/staff into a broader, polarized battle between anti-racist advocacy and "free speech." Finally, we consider the lessons CS1950's consequential activism may provide as activists and scholars respond to white supremacy and other forms of violence and oppression on and near our campuses.

"Social Movement 2.0:" Ecology, Collective Identity and Consequentiality

As Foust and Drazner Hoyt conclude in their review of work at the intersections of social movement and social media ("social movement 2.0" or SM2.0), scholars adopt widely different assumptions concerning the potential of humans and information communication technologies to affect change.¹³ SM2.0 scholarship adopts resource mobilization theory,¹⁴ collective identity theory¹⁵ and network approaches;¹⁶ it has also featured "techno-utopian and dystopian" frameworks, at times uncritically accepting the ability of Web 2.0 platforms to determine—for better or worse—the outcomes of activists' communication.¹⁷

Within this mélange of approaches, a number of scholars favor ecological methodologies to foreground the incredible complexity of SM2.0.¹⁸ Media ecology invites metaphorical attention to how technology serves as a medium, akin to "a substance within which a culture grows."¹⁹ While some early media ecology work is susceptible to charges of technological determinism (as in McLuhan's famous phrase, "the medium is the message"), contemporary ecological methodologies view relationships between people and media as *organic*—both a process and product, simultaneously material and symbolic.²⁰ We adopt Treré and Mattoni's definition of ecology "as a

¹³Foust and Drazner Hoyt, "Social Movement 2.0."

¹⁴Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age* (MIT Press, 2011).

¹⁵Paolo Gerbaudo, "Protest Avatars as Memetic Signifiers: Political Profile Pictures and the Construction of Collective Identity on Social Media in the 2011 Protest Wave," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 916–29.

¹⁶Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

¹⁷Yang Liu, "Tweeting, Re-Tweeting, and Commenting: Microblogging and Social Movements in China," *Asian Journal of Communication* 25, no. 6 (2015): 567–83.

¹⁸See especially: Lindsay Ems, "Twitter's Place in the Tussle: How Old Power Struggles Play out on a New Stage," *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 5 (July 1, 2014): 720–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714529070>; Rodrigo Gómez García and Emiliano Treré, "The# YoSoy132 Movement and the Struggle for Media Democratization in Mexico," *Convergence* 20, no. 4 (2014): 496–510; and Anastasia Kavada, "Creating the Collective: Social Media, the Occupy Movement and Its Constitution as a Collective Actor," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 872–86.

¹⁹Kate Milberry, "Media Ecology," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Communication* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, May 23, 2012).

²⁰Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (MIT Press, 2005).

milieu of agents who are connected in various ways by various exchanges of mediated and unmediated forms of communication.”²¹ Communicative ecologies grow through three facets: the *technological* (e.g., apps, platforms, or the devices that support them), the *social*, as in people and how they organize, and the *discursive*, or the “very content of communication.”²²

Collective identity theory allies well with ecology, foregrounding how social movement is *processural*, and *found in identifications*.²³ More specifically, socially mediated tactics share two important “potentialities:” the building of “political consciousness” by spreading “an argumentative kernel” capable of being “expanded and elaborated far beyond the imagination of any one producer;” and the constituting of individuals as part of political subjects.²⁴ Of course, materialist critics may object that such potentialities are overly “symbolic:” i.e., that, while SM2.0 may articulate identities and meanings, such amorphous effects do not in themselves alleviate exigent conditions or change structures.²⁵ However, as we demonstrate below, the constitution of a collective identity is not only an end in itself. It can, and often does, set off chains of material consequences, e.g., as when inspiring student athletes to boycott, which in turn leads to the ouster of university administrators); and it can, and often does, create long-term potentialities that may or may not be realized, such as preparing anti-racist activists to defend claims that they are defying white supremacists’ “free speech.”

In contrast to traditional resource mobilization (or functionalist) theories, which encourage critics to classify how activists used various media to predetermined ends, ecological methodologies encourage critics to see the forest *and* the trees—so symbols, identities, bodies, performances, material actions, as interdependent members of an ecology. Ecological methodologies also encourage scholars to represent with thick description the meanings emergent from communication, as well as the networks that led to, and emerge from, them. We are particularly interested, following Myers and Hamilton, in exploring “how social media narrativize via form to produce intelligibility from notoriously fluid and ill-defined processes as they are happening.”²⁶ In other words, we consider how advocates *make sense of and advance* the communicative action of which they are a part, in this case through Twitter and Facebook.

Collective identity theory may appear unfashionable amid humanistic theories that focus on the extra- or non-symbolic forces (like affect) that drive social relationships. However, as Kavada argues, even amidst “decentralization, personalized communication and ‘flash mobilizations’” common in a SM2.0 era, groups still “develop their self-understanding as distinct collectives with

²¹Treré and Mattoni, “Media Ecologies and Protest Movements: Main Perspectives and Key Lessons.”

²²Jo A. Tacchi, Don Slater, and Gregory N Hearn, *Ethnographic Action Research: A User’s Handbook* (Unesco, 2003).

²³Paolo Gerbaudo and Emiliano Treré, “In Search of the ‘We’ of Social Media Activism: Introduction to the Special Issue on Social Media and Protest Identities,” 2015; Stefania Milan, “From Social Movements to Cloud Protesting: The Evolution of Collective Identity,” *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 887–900.

²⁴Christopher M Duerringer, “Who Would Jesus Bomb? The Republican Jesus Meme and the Fracturing of Ideology,” *Social Media+ Society* 2, no. 1 (2016): 2056305116637095.

²⁵Christina R. Foust, Amy Pason, and Kate Zittlow Rogness, *What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics* (University of Alabama Press, 2017).

²⁶Cayce Myers and James F. Hamilton, “Social Media as Primary Source: The Narrativization of Twenty-First-Century Social Movements,” *Media History* 20, no. 4 (2014): 431–44.

their own agency.”²⁷ The archival capacities of social media allow participants to construct a narrative from disparate events while also building trust and affinity.²⁸ As Creech describes, “the aggregated, digital record of the movement allows its allies, adherents, opponents, critics, spectators, and descendants” to reflect critically on its politics.²⁹ Social media users leave behind traces of themselves, which Clark terms “artifacts of political engagement,” that evidence users’ emotional investment and participation.³⁰ Memes³¹ and photos, including photobiographic or “selfie” campaigns,³² are easily disseminated on social media with the help of hashtags and addressivity markers (e.g. @mentions and retweets).³³

The present essay advances collective identity theory within studies of SM2.0 through the method of an ecological chronology, a rich timeline that offers a point of reference from which to explore how a collective identity has formed and to what ends. The ecological chronology provides a number of advantages to SM2.0 scholars and activists, including its ability to maintain the emplaced or contextualized nature of “an ecology” while identifying its changes over time.³⁴ Additionally, the ecological chronology provides a comprehensive view on how artifacts of political engagement as advance (or do not advance) a collective identity, while showing the recursive relationship between mediated and immediate, face-to-face communication. Not every collective identity has consequences, and the consequences of an ecology are not limited to representations.³⁵ However, as we trace below, the “concerned student” identity inspired both direct material effects and long-term potentialities.

In order to follow the development of the concerned student identity, we initially searched pervasive movement hashtags and key MU activist, organizational, and administrative accounts dated September 12, 2015 through November 15, 2015 (beginning with student government President Payton Head’s Facebook posting, and closing shortly after Wolfe’s departure). We then explored organizational and activist accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Vimeo, change.org, and YouTube as well as legacy media sources and secondary accounts of face-to-face tactics. Our primary searches were guided by specific hashtags and @handles using Twitter’s “advanced search” feature as well as a pre-written Python script. Following our initial immersion, from which we crafted a chronology of significant events, we revisited some of the most read, retweeted, and commented-upon tweets, addressing, asking: How are participants making sense of the rhetorical action of which they are a part? What collective identity emerges? And how do participants perform and reshape that identity in ways that lead to consequences?

²⁷Anastasia Kavada, “Creating the Collective: Social Media, the Occupy Movement and Its Constitution as a Collective Actor,” *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 872–86.

²⁸Emiliano Treré, “Reclaiming, Proclaiming, and Maintaining Collective Identity in The# YoSoy132 Movement in Mexico: An Examination of Digital Frontstage and Backstage Activism through Social Media and Instant Messaging Platforms,” *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 8 (2015): 901–15.

²⁹Brian Creech, “Digital Representation and Occupy Wall Street’s Challenge to Political Subjectivity,” *Convergence* 20, no. 4 (2014): 461–77.

³⁰Lynn Schofield Clark, “Participants on the Margins: #BlackLivesMatter and the Role That Shared Artifacts of Engagement Played among Minoritized Political Newcomers on Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter,” *International Journal of Communication* 10, no. 1 (2016): 235–53.

³¹Duerringer, “Who Would Jesus Bomb? The Republican Jesus Meme and the Fracturing of Ideology.”

³²Emad Khazraee and Alison N. Novak, “Digitally Mediated Protest: Social Media Affordances for Collective Identity Construction,” *Social Media+ Society* 4, no. 1 (2018): 2056305118765740.

³³Zizi Papacharissi, “Affective Demands and the New Political,” in *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁴Mercea, Iannelli, and Loader, “Protest Communication Ecologies,” 2015.

³⁵Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 2015).

Following Townsend and Wallace, we considered questions of research ethics beyond the simple “public domain” status of Twitter, including whether or not platform users are operating with expectations of privacy or of publicity, and what degrees of risk or repercussions social media users may incur from research publication.³⁶ We obtained consent to quote and/or visually depict social media use from non-public individuals.³⁷

We recognize that, as with any representation, this chronology is partial and reductive of the vibrant activism led by Black MU students. The three-phase chronology roughly (and rapidly) follows Reich’s discussion of how communities affected by toxic pollution obtain redress from institutions while those institutions seek to contain change.³⁸ First, individuals share their private experiences (at the risk of being further stigmatized for speaking out); second, individuals band together in public protests, while continuing to fight institutional efforts to slow the pace and/or shrink the scope of redress; and finally, communities organize around shared political symbols. We find Reich’s three phases are useful to understand how student activists built a concerned student identity to achieve consequential ends, as they moved from private experiences of racism to public and eventually political change, all the while appealing to representatives of MU (and those responsible for oversight on MU) as an institution. The ecological chronology that we structure (with the assistance of Reich) allows us to represent the very complex rhetorical action of student activists as “bits and pieces” that would eventually become a collective identity that strangers (as well as friend and allies) wanted to embody through their actions.

Phase I: Publicizing Personal Experiences with Racism

On September 12, 2015, MU student government President Payton Head prepared Facebook friends: “WARNING; EXPLICIT LANGUAGE: I just want to say how extremely hurt and disappointed I am.”³⁹ He then recounted an incident involving “some guys riding on the back of a pickup truck...continuously scream[ing] NIGGER at me.” Linking personal experiences with university initiatives, Head stated, “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.” Head’s post connected to the slurs, humiliation, fear, and violence faced by MU students who are Muslim, transgender, disabled, gay, or/and women, and calls on readers to educate themselves, join campus efforts, and hold each other accountable—for “It’s time to wake up Mizzou.” Users circulated the post over 1,000 times in a matter of days, and soon, others began linking their experiences of racism to poor university governance.⁴⁰ Head attributed the viral success of the post to his elevated rank as student body president as well as expectations for a direct university response addressing the incident, of which there was not one.⁴¹ When the response did

³⁶Leanne Townsend and Claire Wallace, “Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics,” *University of Aberdeen*, 2016, 1–16.

³⁷We contacted participants via LinkedIn or Twitter, and shared our paper with them. Since our initial research into this project began, some tweets have been permanently removed from Twitter.

³⁸Michael Reich, *Toxic Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁹Payton Head, “Peoples Power Assemblies,” Facebook, November 11, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesPowerAssemblies/posts/932921543409524>.

⁴⁰Susan Svrluga, “What the Student Body President Did after He Was Called the N-Word — Again,” *Washington Post*, September 16, 2015, sec. Grade Point, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/09/16/what-the-student-body-president-did-after-he-was-called-the-n-word-again/>.

⁴¹Spike Lee, *2 Fists Up, Lil’ Joints* (ESPN Film, 2016), <http://theundefeated.com/videos/spike-lees-lil-joints-2-fists-up/>.

arrive six days later, it was in the form of a university-wide letter from MU Chancellor R Bowen Loftin that did not mention the incident or Head, but rather was a general call to “stand against acts of bias and discrimination.”⁴²

Following Head’s posting, social media users began forming a collective identity of concerned students attempting to hold their administration accountable. In seeking accountability, this collective identity stood in contrast to other, similar collective identities. e.g., people who sought the dissolution of the institution, or righteously dejected students of color who were leaving, rather than sacrificing their livelihoods or safety in a predominantly White institution. For example, @_JonathanButler tweeted, “these are YOUR students & YOUR campuses,” directly addressing Loftin and Wolfe.⁴³ Twitter’s addressivity markers allowed student activists to reach university administrators directly, sending the message that, as @_JonathanButler put it, “@MSAPresident @Mizzou @bowtieger @ProvostStokes @MizzouVCSA The rate of your response and the quality of your response is UNACCEPTABLE!”⁴⁴ As collective identities form, individuals not only attach their senses of self to a movement, but also enact “practices or common ways of doing things.”⁴⁵ In Phase I, “concerned students” publicized personal experiences of racism directly to university administrators, providing an archive by which to represent and from which invent new actions concerned students would take in later phases of the chronology.

Amplification of similar messages continued to grow during the Racism Lives Here rallies of September 24 (in MU’s Speakers Circle), and October 1, 2015 (in the more disruptive space of the Student Center⁴⁶), through chants like, “White Silence is Violence” and “No Justice, No Peace.”⁴⁷ As activist Reuben Faloughi stated, the concerned students would persist online and offline: “I don’t like to scream...But nobody will listen. Nobody listens on the forum, nobody listens on the email. . . . We are one bad decision away from a killing on this campus because it is segregated.”⁴⁸ Hashtags not only aggregated and archived personal testimonies of racism, but also allowed students to disrupt institutional denial by intensifying the material presence of socially mediated discourse (see fig. 1). The hashtag/meme directed at the Chancellor, #LoftinCantExplain, gave voice to student grievances, including how the administration had “bowed to political pressure to cancel contracts with Planned Parenthood” and its decision to eliminate “full tuition waivers” and “health insurance” for graduate teaching assistants.⁴⁹ #LoftinCantExplain invited users to complete arguments as concerned students, evident in tweets from @_AbigailHollis, e.g.: “#LoftinCantExplain

⁴²Lee, *2 Fists Up*.

⁴³@_JonathanButler, “@bowtieger @UMPrez @Mizzou These Are YOUR Students & YOUR Campuses. It Is Time to Stop the Injustice.,” Twitter, September 15, 2015, https://twitter.com/_JonathanButler/status/643804385579892736.

⁴⁴@_JonathanButler, “@MSAPresident @Mizzou @bowtieger @ProvostStokes @MizzouVCSA The Rate of Your Response and the Quality of Your Response Is UNACCEPTABLE!,” Twitter, September 17, 2015, https://twitter.com/_JonathanButler/status/644516406361395200.

⁴⁵Kavada, “Creating the Collective: Social Media, the Occupy Movement and Its Constitution as a Collective Actor,” 879.

⁴⁶Lee, *2 Fists Up*.

⁴⁷Note that the #RacismLivesHere rally was not organized by CS1950, though original CS1950 organizers attended.

⁴⁸Nana Naskidashvili, “Students March through MU Student Center in Protest of Racial Injustice,” *Columbia Missourian*, October 1, 2015, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/higher_education/students-march-through-mu-student-center-in-protest-of-racial/article_4b8e3458-688b-11e5-8412-9b38a4d41eb8.html.

⁴⁹Kasia Kovacs, “The Short, Controversial Life (so Far) of MU’s Leader,” *The Missourian*, October 26, 2015, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/higher_education/the-short-controversial-life-so-far-of-mu-s-leader/article_8c675bb2-7911-11e5-a26c-374ecfaa9d5d.html.

why he’s making himself out to be our closest ally when virtually NOTHING has been done to fix our problems.”⁵⁰



Fig. 1. Racism Lives Here news coverage. Photograph by @thomasoide. Retrieved on September 6, 2015 from <https://twitter.com/thomasoide/status/647204396170784768>

Face-to-face actions and digitally communicated grievances reveal the beginning of ongoing demands for institutional redress, in which activists were able not only to publicize their personal stories of racism in political ways but to use the administration’s slow or inadequate responses as evidence of the exigency they faced. Additionally, this first phase showcases how hashtags helped lay down roots, shoots, and seeds for activists, inviting users to complete arguments or/and publicize experiences that connected them to the emergent collective identity. On October 5, 2015, members of the Legion of Black Collegians (LBC) reported that an inebriated White student called LBC members the n-word during the LBC homecoming court rehearsal.⁵¹ Afterwards, the LBC tweeted: “It has come to our attention that OUR court was threatened last night. It is nothing to be taken lightly and it will not be tolerated.”⁵² Throughout the day, the LBC continued to tweet with the hashtags #EnoughIsEnough and #NoMoreSilence, including retweets of support and solidarity from organizations both on and off MU’s campus.⁵³ In turn, individual activists retweeted the LBC

⁵⁰@_AbigailHollis, “#LoftinCantExplain Why He’s Making Himself out to Be Our Closest Ally When Virtually NOTHING Has Been Done to Fix Our Problems,” Twitter, September 24, 2015, https://twitter.com/_AbigailHollis/status/647101096557547520.

⁵¹Izadi Elahe, “Tracking the Incidents That Led to the University of Missouri President’s Exit,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 2015, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-university-of-missouri-president-resignation-timeline-20151109-story.html>.

⁵²@MizzouLBC, “It Has Come to Our Attention That OUR Court Was Threatened Last Night. It Is Nothing to Be Taken Lightly and It Will Not Be Tolerated.,” Twitter, October 7, 2015, <https://twitter.com/MizzouLBC/status/651036580472229888>.

⁵³@MizzouLBC, “We Are Not the First, We Will Not Be the Last. We Will Make the Change #EnoughIsEnough,” Twitter, October 7, 2015, <https://twitter.com/MizzouLBC/status/651037100230373380>; @MizzouLBC, “If You Are Interested in Political Actions, Please Contact Our Political Chair @Marsh_Rebel . #EnoughIsEnough #nomoresilence,” Twitter, October 11, 2015, <https://twitter.com/MizzouLBC/status/651103461375803392>;

posts, including a user who used new hashtags #RacismAtMizzou or #RacismAtMU. Building upon Myers and Hamilton's premise,⁵⁴ Twitter appeared to offer students affordances to help them make sense of their activism in real time, with hashtags to connect, record, and publicize what might otherwise have been silenced or privatized experience. It is also important, from an ecological perspective, to note that student activists did not have a prescription through which they created hashtags, protest events, etc., in advance. Rhetoric like #RacismAtMU or #EnoughIsEnough aggregated and archived via Twitter, but would eventually transform organically into other artifacts of engagement.

The LBC's experiences prompted Chancellor Loftin to announce mandatory online diversity training for incoming MU students, faculty, and staff.⁵⁵ Some lauded Loftin's announcement, but activists remembered his statement in 2014—that eradicating racism at MU “won't happen overnight.”⁵⁶ As @_AbigailHollis tweeted, the “mandatory” training does “not include current students or admin,”⁵⁷ and “Online diversity training will not cover our needs and can be easily brushed off by incoming students and faculty.”⁵⁸ Others playfully deconstructed institutional posts like the @Mizzou tweet celebrating the most recent #RapBattle Winner. @Big_Reub tweeted, “The only time @Mizzou celebrates [its] Black students. Athletics or entertainment...” drawing attention to the hegemonic system's choice to commodify Black bodies rather than listen to and support them.⁵⁹

Phase I tweets demonstrate how CS1950's tone bucks Twitter's reputation as a “divisive and derisive” medium,⁶⁰ a reputation that would be solidified in the Presidential election year following the pinnacle of CS1950's activism.⁶¹ While student activists generally ignored “trolling” on their feeds, they occasionally offered general statements that responded to cynicism, as in @just-beying's tweet: “if you're a current student, condemning other students speaking out on things

@MUBBSA, “A Letter from the Black Business Students Association to Show That We Too Stand with @MizzouLBCpic.Twitter.Com/TU1srDikQG,” Twitter, October 3, 2015, <https://twitter.com/MUBBSA/status/651168758795362305>; Freshman Action Team (@osufat), “#OSUStandsWithMU Racism Is NOT Dead. #BlackLivesMatter,” Twitter, October 9, 2015, <https://twitter.com/osufat/status/651078166417510400>; @MBMI, “Stay Strong My Black Brothers and Sisters. We Stand behind @MizzouLBC,” Twitter, October 12, 2015, <https://twitter.com/MUBMI/status/651116544877981698>; @msamizzou, “The MSA Executive Cabinet Will Stand in Solidarity with @MizzouLBC. We Won't Tolerate Hate at @Mizzou Any Longer,” Twitter, October 12, 2015, <https://twitter.com/MSAmizzou/status/651124692573491205>.

⁵⁴“Social Media as Primary Source: The Narrativization of Twenty-First-Century Social Movements.”

⁵⁵Kovacs, “The Short, Controversial Life (so Far) of MU's Leader.”

⁵⁶Jost, “Culture Shock: Students Push to Shake up Ideas about Race on MU Campus.”

⁵⁷@_AbigailHollis, “1. Training Will Be Only Be Mandatory for Faculty, Staff, and Incoming Freshman. Not Include Current Students or Admin #ConcernedStudent1950,” Twitter, October 14, 2015, https://twitter.com/_AbigailHollis/status/654383198403588096.

⁵⁸@_AbigailHollis, “Online Diversity Training Will Not Cover Our Needs and Can Be Easily Brushed off by Incoming Students and Faculty #ConcernedStudent1950,” Twitter, October 14, 2015, https://twitter.com/_AbigailHollis/status/654384330567892992.

⁵⁹@Big_Reub, “The Only Time @Mizzou Celebrates It's Black Students. Athletics or Entertainment. @kcou @MizzouLife @MSAmizzou #ConcernedStudent1950,” Twitter, October 14, 2015, https://twitter.com/Big_Reub/status/654382678788014080.

⁶⁰Brian L. Ott, “The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 59–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2016.1266686>; Lee, 2 *Fists Up*.

⁶¹Joseph P Zompetti, “Rhetorical Incivility in the Twittersphere: A Comparative Thematic Analysis of Clinton and Trump's Tweets During and After the 2016 Presidential Election,” *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 9 (2019).

they find important, re-evaluate. We all deserve equality.”⁶² More rarely, activists engaged Twitter users in an effort to move them past cynicism (even if it was justified, since the administration controlled the pace and scale of redressing racism). For instance, following a #LoftinCantExplain post, @justbeying incurred a cynical response—namely, that a university official like a Chancellor could not change the racist conditions on campus. @justbeying held firm to the “concerned student” ethos, replying, “I want him to reprimand instances of racism. That stuff doesn’t even go to Student Conduct.”⁶³



Fig. 2. Tweet showing LBC in 1968. Tweet by @MizzouLBC. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/MizzouLBC/status/651040896654315520>

Fig. 3. Tweet with Black Lives Matter study hall flyer. Tweet by @mizzouscca. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/MizzouSCCA/status/651432152408522756>

In the face of institutional attempts to contain the conflict, the student activists intensified their presence, occupying MU’s main administration building in a #BLMStudyHall on October 6, 2015. Tweets announced the occupation with Black power fist emoji, and encouragements to “Bring work, bring your body, make them see you.”⁶⁴ The #BLMStudyHall helped make Black bodies visible on campus, calling out and interrupting the administration’s accommodationist approach by making past waves of dissent present (see fig. 2 and fig. 3). Selfies and hashtags allowed a material embodiment of the “concerned student” identity and Black student visibility to persist after the occupation ended, while also connecting to a collective identity that LBC and other Mizzou students had performed prior.

⁶²@justbeying, “And If You’re a Current Student, Condemning Other Students Speaking out on Things They Find Important, Re-Evaluate. We All Deserve Equality.,” Twitter, September 24, 2015, <https://twitter.com/justbeying/status/647114603743150080>.

⁶³@justbeying, “@Tiffunny__ I Want Him to Reprimand Instances of Racism. That Stuff Doesn’t Even Go to Student Conduct.,” Twitter, September 24, 2015, <https://twitter.com/justbeying/status/647099032406388736>.

⁶⁴@justbeying, “Study Hall in Jesse, Sit in Style. Bring Work, Bring Your Body, Make Them See You. Chant Intermissions and Support,” Twitter, October 5, 2015, <https://twitter.com/justbeying/status/651058058785787904>.

Phase II: From the “Brave 11” to #ConcernedStudent1950

On October 10, 2015, 11 students obstructed the MU homecoming parade, wearing black t-shirts that read, “1839 was built on my B(L)ACK.” Informally known as the “Brave 11,” the group consisted of student activists who were the only individuals (out of around 100) that answered another student’s call for a homecoming parade demonstration.⁶⁷ Depicted in a video online, a student announces the protest through a megaphone:

This is not an indictment on White folks, but it is an indictment on White structures and White supremacy. In 1839, the University of Missouri was established as a flagship institution west of the Mississippi. This institution was for White men only....and was built on the backs of Black people.⁶⁸

Soon, homecoming revelers began shouting for the activists to leave, while the activists shared critical incidents of racism related to Mizzou (e.g., MU’s denial of a Black law school applicant in 1935, and racist graffiti on campus in 2011).⁶⁹ Eventually, the eleven linked arms around the red convertible transporting Wolfe and his wife.

While a few onlookers linked arms with the activists, other gold and black-clad Tiger fans formed a perimeter between the activists and the convertible and mocked the activists while Wolfe smiled in appreciation.⁷⁰ The activists concluded with a call and response chant inspired by Black activist Assata Shakur: “It is our duty to fight for freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains,”⁷¹ followed by “ASHÉ...Power.”⁷²

Following the parade, activists tweeted a letter announcing the group’s name, #ConcernedStudent1950, with 1950 referencing the year that MU admitted its first Black student.⁷³ The screen-captured letter (which creatively defied Twitter’s former 140-character limit) explained the group’s tactical choice to block Wolfe’s convertible and continued linking 2015 to a history of segregation and racist violence. With 200 retweets and 124 likes on @justbeyings’ tweet alone (see fig. 5), the letter further constituted CS1950’s identities as aggrieved MU students who would neither leave, be silent, nor continue to be ignored. Along with Wolfe’s deafening silence, many bystanders’ reactions demonstrated the depths of racism and White privilege affecting the MU campus climate. CS1950 recalled that the parade bystanders chose to chant M-I-Z-Z-O-U to “drown out the hard historical facts of how we, as black students, have always been excluded within a space we have also thrived and contributed to greatly.”⁷⁴ The jeers #ConcernedStudent1950 received demonstrated that the administrative response to campus racism had to move past “*immaculate* business PR” and “online training materials easily skimmed through.”

⁶⁷Lee, *2 Fists Up*.

⁶⁸Concerned Student, *1839 Built on Our Black Homecoming Parade Demonstration*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6zwnmlzZSQ&feature=youtu.be>.

⁶⁹Concerned Student.

⁷⁰Lee, *2 Fists Up*.

⁷¹Naskidashvili, “Students March through MU Student Center in Protest of Racial Injustice.”

⁷²Concerned Student, *1839 Built on Our Black Homecoming Parade Demonstration*.

⁷³Ruth Serven and Ashley Reese, “In Homecoming Parade, Racial Justice Advocates Take Different Paths,” *The Missourian*, October 10, 2015, http://www.columbiainmissourian.com/news/in-homecoming-parade-racial-justice-advocates-take-different-paths/article_24c824da-6f77-11e5-958e-fb15c6375503.html; “Ashe was a commonly used in chants by CS1950, and refers to a Yoruban concept roughly translated as harnessing ‘the power to make things happen,’” Fúnláyò (n.d.), <http://www.aseire.com/meaning.php>.

⁷⁴@justbeyings, “This Is Our Story. #ConcernedStudent1950,” Twitter), October 13, 2015, <https://twitter.com/bey-notby/status/653933308133306368>.

CS1950 also tweeted photos and videos of bystanders pushing them, and police threatening them with pepper spray (see fig. 6). By Phase II, it was clear that not only would concerned students publicize personal experiences of racism; they would also put their bodies on the line to hold administration accountable and educate audiences about how Mizzou was built upon systemic inequalities and racist injustices. Risking common dismissals of activists as narcissistic—along with stereotypes that position Black activists as angry or dangerous—CS1950 promoted solidarity and deepened political antagonism through their hashtagged name. Additionally, the introduction of #ConcernedStudent1950 complemented the Brave 11’s literal banding together at the parade, illustrating a recursive relationship between on-the-ground protest and socially mediated activism. As in the Black Power fist emoji and photos of LBC members in 1968, #ConcernedStudent1950 also re-presented a collective identity in recursive relationship between past and present.



Fig. 5. Tweet with image of CS1950 letter. Tweet by @justbeyng. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/beynotby/status/653933308133306368>

Fig. 6. Tweet depicting push back from homecoming attendees. Tweet by @MaxHPF Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/MaxHPF/status/653962026969112576>

Though MU’s main Twitter account was very active celebrating homecoming events at this time, administrators did not reply to any comments regarding #ConcernedStudent1950. The administration continued its pattern of resting in institutional power, in effect containing CS1950’s dissent by ignoring it.⁷⁵ But the contrasting images of Wolfe hamming it up for the camera (see fig. 7), with Black bodies in peril as his convertible progressed forward, provided much fuel for CS1950’s charges of administrative incompetence. Several activists (including @MaxHPF) tweeted images depicting the convertible’s grill proceeding into a protestor’s legs (see fig. 8). @Big_Reub tweeted: “@UMPrez III never forget the stare from you as a White man with privilege and your decision to sit in silence. #concernedstudent1950.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵Reich, *Toxic Politics*.

⁷⁶@Big_Reub, “@UMPrez III Never Forget the Stare from You as a White Man with Privilege and Your Decision to Sit in Silence. #concernedstudent1950,” Twitter, October 13, 2015, https://twitter.com/Big_Reub/status/653943068534566912.



Fig. 7. President Wolfe in the homecoming parade. Tweet and photo by @umsystem. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/umsystem/status/652861654355410944>

Fig. 8: Tweet describing incident with President Wolfe’s car. Tweet by @MaxHPF. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/MaxHPF/status/653961561464307712>

Activists kept the lack of accountability fresh, tweeting updates such as “Day 13 & @UMPrez remains SILENT. No public RESPONSE or STANCE to #ConcernedStudent1950 or @Mizzou stakeholders.”⁷⁷ Previously a regular user, Wolfe ceased to tweet after October 8, 2015.⁷⁸ In contrast, academic units issued public letters of support, which CS1950 members shared (see fig. 9). CS1950 issued a formal list of demands, including an apology from Wolfe for his inaction at the parade protest; his immediate removal as system president; and “a more comprehensive racial awareness and inclusion curriculum overseen by minority students and faculty.”⁷⁹ Following another racist incident on campus (in which someone drew a swastika with feces in a residence hall⁸⁰), Wolfe called a private meeting with CS1950 members. However, he refused to grant any demands.⁸¹

⁷⁷@Big_Reub, “Day 13 & @UMPrez Remains SILENT. No Public RESPONSE or STANCE to #ConcernedStudent1950 or @Mizzou Stakeholders. This Is DISTURBING Behavior.” Twitter, October 23, 2015, 13, https://twitter.com/Big_Reub/status/657543938165837824.

⁷⁸A member of CS1950 stated that the group was approached by a member of the football team on Wednesday of that week to discuss how the team could get involved in their activist efforts (Missourian Staff, 2015b).

⁷⁹Michael Pearson, “A Timeline of the University of Missouri Protests,” *CNN*, November 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/09/us/missouri-protest-timeline/index.html>.

⁸⁰Associated Press, “Police Report Confirms University of Missouri Swastika Story,” *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 12, 2015, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/education/police-report-confirms-university-of-missouri-swastika-story/article_4ee0f112-098f-59a3-9f3d-ebd1d6335003.html.

⁸¹Pearson, “A Timeline of the University of Missouri Protests.”



Fig. 9. Letter of support from the Department of Women's & Gender Studies. Tweet by @mizzouwgst. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/mizzouwgst/status/655018746000510976>

Raising the stakes of CS1950's activism, @_JonathanButler tweeted his decision to embark on a hunger strike until Wolfe resigned: "It's time for a change y'all. Real change. #MizzouHungerStrike #ConcernedStudent1950."⁸² Butler shared a two-page statement written to the curators along with the tweet (which was retweeted 618 times), arguing that Wolfe was not meeting the job description under which he was hired, evident by the MSA President's experiences with racism, the ending of Planned Parenthood services, and responses to #ConcernedStudent1950. @_JonathanButler concluded: "A world where a university president in charge of thousands of personnel, millions of dollars, and countless moving pieces and can still afford the luxury of being 'not completely' aware of the environment they function in is a scary place to be" (p. 1).

By early November, #ConcernedStudent1950 represented a political identity, with activists demanding specific, demonstrable changes to ameliorate campus racism. The administration could not continue containing the conflict through dissociation and diversion, as #ConcernedStudent1950 artfully wove the energy and agency of individual tactics into the collective identity.⁸³ For instance, @Big_Reub tweeted a letter of support for Butler and CS1950 activists from a *Kansas City Star* reporter along with two hashtags that occurred together often in Phase II: "A well

⁸²@_JonathanButler, "It's Time for a Change y'all. Real Change. #MizzouHungerStrike #ConcernedStudent1950pic.Twitter.Com/QY7XjNs69o," Twitter, November 2, 2015, https://twitter.com/_JonathanButler/status/661213299858472962.

⁸³Reich, *Toxic Politics*.

written letter about the bravery of JB and many others. #Concernedstudent1950 #MizzouHungerStrike”⁸⁴ While it would have been easy to individualize concerned student agency (e.g., into Butler’s as the hunger striker), the hashtags helped redirect the growing energy of resistance into collective identities. Activists created a petition to call for Wolfe’s removal, regularly appending change.org signature counts with the hashtags. As Kavada reminds us, collective identities are not simply propositions with which one agrees or disagrees; they comprise stances and action.⁸⁵ The hashtag #MizzouHungerStrike heightened immediacy in virtual spaces, reminding Twitter users that real bodies were deeply harmed by campus racism. #ConcernedStudent1950 also allowed those who signed the change.org petition to remove Wolfe to see their action as consequential, within the realm of what “concerned students” did to hold administration accountable.

On November 2, 2015, CS1950 began an encampment on MU’s Carnahan Quadrangle.⁸⁶ The 24-7 presence of activists on campus—particularly in miserably rainy conditions—made it clear that concerned students were not going to fade into the Twitterverse.⁸⁷ Activists called for students to #BoycottMU by refusing to “spend money in the Student Center, campus markets, or non-dining plan facilities,” and later retweeted prospective Tigers’ decision to delay attending MU until Wolfe resigned.⁸⁸ Under an intensifying national spotlight, three more events, all remediated and amplified on Twitter, solidified the move from public accountability to political consciousness.

On November 6, 2015, Wolfe stated, “I was caught off guard” at the homecoming parade, and “had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them perhaps we wouldn’t be where we are today.”⁸⁹ Wolfe added, “Racism does exist at our university, and it is unacceptable. It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty and staff.”⁹⁰ However, off-script at a fundraising event in Kansas City, an activist asked Wolfe to define systematic oppression to which Wolfe replied, “systematic oppression is because you don’t believe you have the equal opportunity for success.”⁹¹ Soon after a video of this incident appeared on Twitter, students relentlessly called out Wolfe. Examples included a video tutorial from @MSAPresident (see fig. 10) and @_AbigailHollis’s tweet, “@umcurators the UM System president questions the existence of systemic oppression! #WolfeGottaGo.”⁹²

⁸⁴@Big_Reub, “A Well Written Letter about the Bravery of JB and Many Others. #Concernedstudent1950 #MizzouHungerStrike” Twitter, November 7, 2015, https://twitter.com/Big_Reub/status/663113080713285633.

⁸⁵Kavada, “Creating the Collective: Social Media, the Occupy Movement and Its Constitution as a Collective Actor.”

⁸⁶Kasia Kovacs, “Student Activists Camp out to Protest Wolfe and Support Hunger Strike,” *Columbia Missourian*, *The Missourian*, November 2, 2015, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/higher_education/student-activists-camp-out-to-protest-wolfe-and-support-hunger/article_b204b8b4-81dc-11e5-a4a0-cb305bb09bed.html.

⁸⁷Jacob Bogage, “Two Hours in a Cold, Dark Tent on the Carnahan Quadrangle,” *The Missourian*, November 6, 2015, https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/higher_education/two-hours-in-a-cold-dark-tent-on-the-carnahan/article_88592650-844b-11e5-ac04-4b54bb2c4f40.html.

⁸⁸@_AbigailHollis, “Do Not Spend Money in the Student Center, Campus Markets, or Non Dining Plan Facilities #BoycottMU #MizzouHungerStrike,” Twitter, November 4, 2015, https://twitter.com/_AbigailHollis/status/661890261971173376.

⁸⁹Elahé, “Tracking the Incidents That Led to the University of Missouri President’s Exit.”

⁹⁰Elahé.

⁹¹Missourian Staff, “UPDATE: Protesters Meet UM System President Outside Kansas City Fundraiser,” *The Missourian*, November 6, 2015, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/higher_education/update-protesters-meet-um-system-president-outside-kansas-city-fundraiser/article_ecbd2628-84d2-11e5-8979-2f08eccf644a.html.

⁹²@_AbigailHollis, “@umcurators the UM System President Questions the Existence of Systemic Oppression! #WolfeGottaGo” Twitter, November 6, 2015, https://twitter.com/_AbigailHollis/status/662838018588327936.



Fig. 10. Tutorial on systemic racism. Tweet by @MSAPresident. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/MSAPresident/status/662990584274132992>

Social media provided student activists a scaffolding to respond to another instance of bigotry on campus, in which four young White men called @_lexxtherexx and a friend the n-word. @_lexxtherexx's tweet (which received 385 retweets and 349 likes) reflects the growing political dimension of the concerned student collective identity, as she prefaced her personal testimony with the institution's stated values of "Respect, Discovery, Excellence and Responsibility."⁹³ Adding addressivity markers and a hashtag, @_JonathanButler integrated the tweet into the exigency faced by concerned students: "@umcurators this is what we are fighting against! We want change!! #ConcernedStudent1950."⁹⁴

Meanwhile, on November 7, 2015, CS1950, the LBC and their allies organized a resistant campus tour during Visiting Day, reciting MU's history of racism to prospective students and their families.⁹⁵ The tour included a poignant speech highlighting MU's feigned attempts to address racism. A video of this speech would soon go viral, receiving 2,469 retweets and 2,134 likes on Twitter alone.⁹⁶ Like the #BLMStudyHall and the quadrangle occupation, the tour showed the material consequences of CS1950's collective identity. Concerned students were literally reclaiming MU to meet student concerns, with social media archiving this reclamation into perpetuity.

⁹³@_lexxtherexx, "Statement in Regard to the Incident Involving @MsLetbetter and I Last Night. @Mizzou @UMPrez @bowtieger," Twitter, November 10, 2015, https://twitter.com/_lexxtherexx/status/663046171691106304.

⁹⁴@_JonathanButler, "@umcurators This Is What We Are Fighting against! We Want Change!! #ConcernedStudent1950," Twitter, November 1, 2015, https://twitter.com/_JonathanButler/status/663089368307859456.

⁹⁵Elizabeth Sawey and Kelsie Schrader, "Protesters Use Recruiting Day to Voice Concerns about Racism at MU," *The Missourian*, November 7, 2015, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/local/protesters-use-recruiting-day-to-voice-concerns-about-racism-at/article_a8477d70-8579-11e5-ae8c-6f3361124450.html.

⁹⁶Melanie Schmitz, "The Mizzou Student Activists Behind the Protests That Overhauled The University Administration," November 9, 2015, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/122583-the-mizzou-student-activists-behind-the-protests-that-overhauled-the-university-administration>.

Continued calls to boycott all university services may have inspired the next major turning point for #ConcernedStudent1950.

Phase III: @CS_1950 Outgrows Immediacy

On November 7, 2015, more than 30 MU student athletes announced they would not participate in any football related activities until Wolfe resigned.⁹⁷ The LBC tweeted a photo of Butler linking arms with athletes of color (see fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Football boycott tweet. Tweet by @MizzouLBC. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/MizzouLBC/status/663177684428566532>

Garnering 2,912 retweets and 2,246 likes, the accompanying statement made clear that concerned students were using their spheres of influence to hold the administration accountable, while embodying through *their* action a demand for the deeper, more thoroughgoing institutional transformation required to make larger values pervasively real: “The athletes of color at the University of Missouri truly believe ‘Injustice Anywhere is a threat to Justice Everywhere.’” MU football players tweeted the photo along with statements like: “We’re black. Black is powerful. Our struggle may look different, but we are all #ConcernedStudent1950.”⁹⁸ By Phase III, #ConcernedStudent1950 operated simultaneously as a hashtag capable of aggregating and archiving the discursive action of a group; a point of identification through which individuals could self-present their own actions; and a stance inspiring political actions (e.g., fighting injustice and racism, constituting a more just university). The activist’s hashtagged name underscores the complexity of ecological methodologies, showing how rhetoric is simultaneously instrumental, relational, and materially consequential.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Marc Tracy and Ashley Southall, “Black Football Players Lend Heft to Protests at Missouri,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2015, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/09/us/missouri-football-players-boycott-in-protest-of-university-president.html>.

⁹⁸Timothy Burke, “Missouri Football Players Go On Strike To Force Removal Of School President,” *Deadspin*, November 7, 2015, <https://deadspin.com/missouri-football-players-go-on-strike-to-force-removal-1741242246>.

⁹⁹Mercea, Iannelli, and Loader, “Protest Communication Ecologies,” 2016.

Disrupting the administration's pattern of happenstance responses or vapid declarations of "care," the November 7, 2015 events demonstrated the activists' move into a political framework, wherein their ecology not only advanced a public cause, but a collective identity representing greater values that others sought to join. Because of the football team's strong fan followership, the decision by MU players of color to show their support for CS1950 increased the pressure on Wolfe. It put Wolfe on immediate notice, as a forfeiture on that weekend's game alone would have resulted in a \$1 million fine.¹⁰⁰ Tweets about MU jumped from a few hundred to nearly 16,000.¹⁰¹ Riding this momentum, activists created an official Twitter account, @CS_1950, on November 8, 2015.¹⁰² This change was introduced with the tweet: "Follow @CS_1950 to stay updated with #ConcernedStudent1950! We have an account to keep folk in the loop with what's going on."¹⁰³ The account served as a megaphone, amplifying events and messages in real time.

On November 8, several people shared statuses affirming their support for the group's efforts, demonstrating the political power now infused within #ConcernedStudent1950 as not only an activist group with whom people identified, but also a stance toward administrative accountability, the eradication of racism, and the creation of a more just Mizzou campus, system of higher education, and community overall. About 25 minutes later, head football coach Gary Pinkel launched a tweetstorm along with an image of athletes of color, White players, and coaching staff standing together that received 14,516 retweets and 14,182 likes: "The Mizzou Family stands as one. We are united. We are behind our players. #ConcernedStudent1950 GP."¹⁰⁴

The next day, Wolfe resigned, and Loftin announced his intention to step down by year's end.¹⁰⁵ The LBC shared a video of jubilant students celebrating the end of the hunger strike, while @CS_1950 tweeted, "do not be moved! Our Brother can eat, but we are still owed Demands! Stay strong!"¹⁰⁶ In spite of @CS_1950's encouragement, the football team's decision to boycott marked a turning point in which it seemed to some, especially in the larger mainstream media ecology, that the material effects of the movement were limited to Wolfe's ouster.¹⁰⁷ Several articles were

¹⁰⁰Clarence Green (@clgreen93mu), "This Is JUST Not about Race. It's about Grad Students Getting Benefits and Unity within the Athletes and Community#ConcernedStudent1950 #GGM," Twitter, November 7, 2015, <https://twitter.com/clgreen93mu/status/663187724854124544>.

¹⁰¹Philip Bump, "How the Missouri Football Team Just Took down Its University President," *chicagotribune.com*, *The Chicago Tribune*, November 9, 2015, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/college/ct-missouri-football-players-president-20151109-story.html>.

¹⁰²Richard Marsh, "When Is My Twitter Birthday? Find out Now," My Twitter Birthday, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://mytwitterbirthday.com>.

¹⁰³@justbeyond, "Follow @CS_1950 to Stay Updated with #ConcernedStudent1950! We Have an Account to Keep Folk in the Loop with What's Going On," Twitter, November 9, 2015, <https://twitter.com/justbeyond/status/663397796943257600>.

¹⁰⁴Pinkel has since claimed that a media assistant composed the tweet for him, tacking on #ConcernedStudent1950 (Brooks Holton, "Race Often Is Forgotten in Football — until Players Become Activists," *Vox Magazine*, November 16, 2017, https://www.voxmagazine.com/magazine/race-often-is-forgotten-in-football-until-players-become-activists/article_9cfc53b8-ca42-11e7-8f01-7b72a1fb1d98.html). Pinkel now frames his support as solely for Jonathan Butler, rather than "agenda"—though given that Butler undertook his hunger strike to hold Wolfe accountable for racism, it seems odd to attempt dividing them.

¹⁰⁵Nick Viviani, "University of Missouri Chancellor Follows President in Stepping Down," November 9, 2015, <http://www.wibw.com/home/headlines/The-Latest-University-of-Missouri-System-president-resigns-343731172.html>.

¹⁰⁶@CS_1950, "Brothers and Sisters, This Is a Momentous Occasion but Do Not Be Moved! Our Brother Can Eat, but We Are Still Owed Demands! Stay Strong!," Twitter, November 9, 2015, https://twitter.com/CS_1950/status/663760197521829892.

¹⁰⁷Of their original demands, CS1950 achieved the second, as Wolfe resigned. CS1950 re-issued its unmet demands in February, 2016, while MU pledged to double the percentage of minority faculty members by 2020 along with

published with little or no mention of CS1950 and with titles similar to the *Chicago Tribune's* "How the Missouri football team just took down its university president."¹⁰⁸ As one sports writer tweeted, "It's sad that a student starving himself doesn't get attention like a football strike."¹⁰⁹

With the football team's decision, the ecology would soon grow beyond its immediate roots in the MU campus environment and become representative of an antagonism between anti-racist activism and freedom of speech—an antagonism that has reverberated across the US in the time since. At the moment in which the Black student activists had achieved tremendous political power, their presence became intolerable to whiteness, whether the whiteness of the MU central administration or, more pertinently to this analysis, to a White libertarian perspective that advocates "free expression" in ways that discipline black and brown bodies, particularly those bodies making use of the First Amendment to eradicate racism.

Tiger football's boycott recontextualized MU, not as a campus being transformed by "concerned students," but as a central partisan battleground in Missouri, a state that would become deeply "red" in the 2016 election.¹¹⁰ Presidential candidate Donald Trump responded to the events on FOX news, stating: "I think it's disgusting. I think the two people that resigned are weak, ineffective people. ...they set something in motion that is going to be a disaster for a long period of time."¹¹¹

The events of November 9, 2015 seemed to confirm a "common sense" proliferated by US conservatives for decades now, namely, that universities are hotbeds for "liberal indoctrination."¹¹² As the concerned students sought sanctuary and fellowship on the quadrangle, greater discursive forces swept in to reframe their efforts as intolerable examples of Black political agency and violations of free speech. Individuals continued to threaten the lives and safety of Black students.¹¹³

mandating campus diversity training [Bill Pollock, "Concerned Student 1950 Re-Issues Demands to the University of Missouri," *Missourinet* (blog), February 24, 2016, <https://www.missourinet.com/2016/02/24/concerned-student-1950-re-issues-demands-to-the-university-of-missouri/#more-97039>]. Activist demands are but one way to assess social change, and the consequentiality of CS1950 activism continues to be written as we elaborate.

¹⁰⁸Bump, "How the Missouri Football Team Just Took down Its University President."

¹⁰⁹Dave Zirin, "Black Mizzou Football Players Are Going on Strike Over Campus Racism," *The Nation*, November 8, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/black-mizzou-football-players-are-going-on-strike-over-campus-racism/>.

¹¹⁰With the Republican Party often depicted with the color red, we note that Donald J. Trump edged out Ted Cruz by about 1700 votes in Missouri during the 2016 primary, and solidly won Missouri in the general election with 56.4% of the vote, compared to 37.9% for Clinton and 53.9% for Romney in 2012 (The New York Times, "Missouri," The New York Times, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/>

[results/states/missouri.html](https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/states/missouri.html)). Trump carried every county in Missouri, save for those surrounding Kansas City, Columbia, and St. Louis (The New York Times, "Missouri Election Results 2016," The New York Times, August 1, 2017, sec. U.S., <http://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/missouri>). Missouri's stature as a moderate "swing state" had therefore eroded by 2016, and, as one analyst reflected, "It will be difficult to find a much more Republican state" now (Kevin McDermott, "'What the Hell Happened' in Missouri? The Evolution of a Newly Minted Red State," *stltoday.com*, November 10, 2016, https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/what-the-hell-happened-in-missouri-the-evolution-of-a/article_5b800c9c-7aa1-5164-b510-d1f87b16f6b4.html).

¹¹¹Lee, *2 Fists Up*.

¹¹²Michael Berube, "What's Liberal about the Liberal Arts? Classroom Politics and" Bias," *Higher Education*, 2006, 93.

¹¹³Ben Mathis-Lilley, "Arrest Made for Threat of Violence During Chaotic Night at University of Missouri," *Slate*, November 11, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2015/11/11/arrest_for_violent_threats_at_university_of_missouri.html.

From a drive-by display of the confederate flag,¹¹⁴ to Yik Yak threats (fig. 12), to memes devoted to demonizing activists and athletes as “crybabies” and “sensitive snowflakes,” threats and slander grew more intense.¹¹⁵

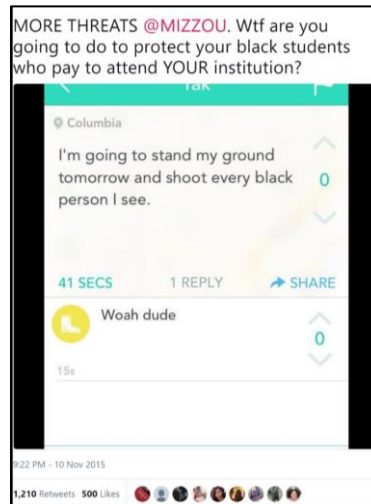


Fig. 12. Tweet featuring threatening Yik Yak post. Tweet by @Nettaaaaaaaa Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/Nettaaaaaaaa/status/664281913780215808>

In response, activists staked signage around the perimeter of their encampment requesting “NO MEDIA/SAFE SPACE,” and declined to take interviews with journalists, because “There were media personnel who were very hostile toward [them] when [they] asked to have certain spaces respected.”¹¹⁶ @CS_1950 tweeted a series of messages reminding observers of their collective identity as concerned students making a better campus for everyone: “The campsite is inclusive of all identities [as] it’s always been, but it was created by [B]lack students!”¹¹⁷ @CS_1950 followed this tweet with: “White, [B]lack, and all other ethnicities have been able to converse and build from fellowshiping at the camp site.”¹¹⁸ That afternoon, three MU faculty and staff joined students at the campsite, asking a student journalist and photographer to leave the immediate area. Caught on video, and soon spreading with as much force as Pinkel’s tweet, Assistant Professor Melissa Click angrily stated, “Who wants to help me get this reporter out of here? I need some muscle over here.”¹¹⁹ While reticent to respond to students being pushed by fans and police during the homecoming parade, MU took immediate action in reviewing Click’s courtesy appointment

¹¹⁴Adam Duxter, “Just Witnessed Two Large Trucks, One with a Confederate Flag, Slowly Drive by the #ConcernedStudent1950 Camp out. Unreal.,” Twitter, November 1, 2015, https://twitter.com/Adam_Duxter/status/663473796507037696.

¹¹⁵Citations supporting this claim have been removed to preserve the anonymity of the authors of these tweets.

¹¹⁶Austin Huguelet and Daniel Victor, “‘I Need Some Muscle’: Missouri Activists Block Journalists,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2015, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/10/us/university-missouri-protesters-block-journalists-press-freedom.html>.

¹¹⁷@CS_1950, “The Campsite Is Inclusive of All Identities Has It’s Always Been, but It Was Created by Black Students!,” Twitter, November 5, 2015, https://twitter.com/CS_1950/status/663871149080604672.

¹¹⁸@CS_1950, “White, Black, and All Other Ethnicities Have Been Able to Converse and Build from Fellowshiping at the Camp Site. That Isn’t for Your Story,” Twitter, November 5, 2015, https://twitter.com/CS_1950/status/663872027879538689.

¹¹⁹Simon Adebisi, *I Need Some Muscle over Here*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_vgu4ewxVc.

with the Department of Communication.¹²⁰ Click was charged with misdemeanor assault and eventually fired from her post at MU, with the debate now established on Twitter as a reductive, binaristic choice between the right to freedom of speech (as represented by a student journalist and photographer) versus the right of Black students to occupy a public site on campus. It was as though the media ecology had outgrown a canopy in Columbia, and casual observers, sports fans, and the infamous Twitter trolls pounced.

@CS_1950 tweeted, “We truly appreciate having our story told, but this movement isn’t for you” at 3:42pm on November 9, 2015.¹²¹ The 62 replies to this posting provide a snapshot of the discursive contest to follow—one in which an unreflexive defense of “free speech” (in support of journalistic freedom) antagonizes anti-racist activism (manifest in the space CS1950 tried to clear on campus, for, among other things, multiracial fellowship). The comments include “armchair” advocates who claimed that CS1950 had no power without the media, and who criticized CS1950 for giving fodder to conservative news outlets. Responses also school @CS_1950 on property law and echo some of the criticisms Twitter users volleyed at the boycotting MU football players, such as the one user who reminded @CS_1950 that the quadrangle was built with taxpayer dollars. Others reduce the campus request for a safe space to an ironically exclusionary move, sometimes leveling charge of “reverse racism,” or blasting CS1950 as hypocrites. A few replies display outright, overt racism, going as far as to call activists the n-word while celebrating White hegemony and using the hashtag #Donald2016.

As the ecology outgrew its canopy in Columbia, “concerned students” became reframed (in the words of one *National Review* analyst) as “campus radicals” who “rule[d] without serious consequence” until “news of their extremism...[broke] outside the leftist cocoon.”¹²² #ConcernedStudent1950 had constructed a collective identity capacious enough for many MU faculty to walk out on November 9, with a number of state Republicans joining Democrats in calling for Wolfe’s resignation.¹²³ But after the events on the quad, “Missouri lawmakers excoriated university leaders for the handling of the events and have since punished MU and the system” to the tune of a \$50 million decrease in higher education funding.¹²⁴ With first-year student enrollment falling 35% since 2015 (42% among Black students and 21% among White students), MU closed seven residence halls and left over 400 positions unfilled.¹²⁵ Pinkel retired, nine of twelve deans and four of eight curators departed.¹²⁶ Mainstream national outlets positioned Mizzou as a cautionary

¹²⁰ Missouri School of Journalism, “Dean David Kurpius Comments on Student’s Coverage of Protest on Carnahan Quad,” Missouri School of Journalism, November 10, 2015, <https://journalism.missouri.edu/2015/11/dean-david-kurpius-comments-on-students-coverage-of-protest-on-carnahan-quad/>; Lee, 2 *Fists Up*.

¹²¹ @CS_1950, “We Truly Appreciate Having Our Story Told, but This Movement Isn’t for You.,” Twitter, November 4, 2015, https://twitter.com/cs_1950/status/663864213870239744.

¹²² David French, “Missouri Update: Crazy Campus Radicals Are Financially Crippling the University,” *National Review*, March 9, 2016, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/missouri-update-crazy-campus-radicals-are-financially-crippling-university/>.

¹²³ Elise Schmelzer, “State Investigation Focuses on Decades-Old Relationship between MU, Planned Parenthood,” *Columbia Missourian*, September 15, 2015, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/local/state-investigation-focuses-on-decades-old-relationship-between-mu-planned/article_de825b18-5bd9-11e5-b5d3-8b294f78e0ba.html.

¹²⁴ Edward McKinley, “Two Years after Protests, New Leadership Looks to Send MU on Upward Trajectory,” *The Missourian*, November 12, 2017, https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/higher_education/two-years-after-protests-new-leadership-looks-to-send-mu/article_cddef196-c0c6-11e7-ba00-a72f6e6a1a85.html.

¹²⁵ Anemona Hartocollis, “Long After Protests, Students Shun the University of Missouri,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 2017, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/09/us/university-of-missouri-enrollment-protests-fall-out.html>.

¹²⁶ McKinley, “Two Years after Protests, New Leadership Looks to Send MU on Upward Trajectory.”

tale,¹²⁷ while right-wing news outlets termed MU's institutional turnover the "Mizzou Effect" (similar to the "Ferguson Effect" label, used to create the counterfactual "war on police," and the "Kaepernick Effect," used to explain declining National Football League ratings).¹²⁸

Conservative outlets have also continued to frame anti-racist campus activism as antagonistic to free speech. *National Review*, for example, shared an email dated November 11, from "A parent paying full tuition for his sophomore son" at MU:

Free speech is under assault on campus by immature, spoiled, thin skinned punks...I am seriously considering removing my son after this semester. I will never allow him to take the politically correct "racial sensitivity training" if required.¹²⁹

The whiteness inherent in this antagonism is apparent: the parent denied that CS1950 used free speech and expression to build a consequential collective identity, while asserting that anti-racist education inherently tramples First Amendment protections. Within a larger discursive context that frames anti-racist activism as antagonistic to free speech, responding to de-contextualization is challenging. Whether, and how well, campus activists respond may well determine the expansion of CS1950's collective identity and its consequentiality. We consider re-contextualization—or the expansion of an ecological unit beyond its situatedness in an immediate environment—a priority for rhetorical critics and communication ecologists.

Conclusion

As our ecological chronology demonstrates, social media helped advocates make sense of and advance the communicative action of which they were a part. #ConcernedStudent1950 not only represented efforts to hold the MU administration accountable to the university's vision and values; it also encouraged various participants on campus to resist through their own spheres of influence, as "concerned students" had in the past. From joining a #BLMStudyHall, penning a departmental statement of solidarity, disseminating one's experiences of racism on campus, signing a change.org petition, occupying university spaces, embarking on a hunger strike, or refusing to perform as a student athlete, #ConcernedStudent1950 became the way to make sense of these varied actions as meaningful and, eventually, consequential. In like manner, as students moved from speaking in university-sanctioned protest spaces like the Speakers Circle to occupying the Carnahan quad and marching through university buildings,¹³⁰ #ConcernedStudent1950 and @CS_1950 cultivated digital spaces that could no longer be ignored or easily bypassed.

The work required to move an issue from private to public to political—particularly in the face of institutional and systemic injustice—is intense, and social media is no panacea. Social media affordances do permit high-speed circulation, as illustrated by advocates' ability to publicly share

¹²⁷Hartocollis, "Long After Protests, Students Shun the University of Missouri."

¹²⁸Daniel Engber, "Measuring the Mizzou Effect," *Slate*, September 12, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2017/09/does_a_school_s_enrollment_really_go_down_when_students_protest_en_masse.html.

¹²⁹Jillian Kay Melchoir, "New Revelations about Mizzou Crisis," *National Review*, April 26, 2016, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/04/mizzou-firings-chronicle-campus-crisis/>.

¹³⁰Lee, *2 Fists Up*.

personal testimonies within hours of incidents of campus racism.¹³¹ But from an ecological perspective, the speed of Twitter would have helped little in intensifying political demands had Head not posted on Facebook in September, had activists not encouraged students to join the #Loftin-CantExplain meme, had boycotting not been within a concerned student's stance toward accountability, etc. Far from a tool capable of achieving predictable results, Twitter was one of many media communicatively spreading the concerned student identity.

Yet, an ecological methodology encourages us to consider Twitter's affordances as they helped lay down roots and extend shoots, proliferating the collective identity. Hashtags aggregated and archived concerned students' testimonies and varied actions, while @handles helped them directly address authority figures. Twitter also allowed for CS1950's occupations, marches, and demonstrations to materialize the concerned student identity beyond initial performances. Our analysis does not support Myers and Hamilton's conclusion that Twitter operates as a classically liberal, individualist medium.¹³² However, we do find that social media builds and sustains collective identities in real-time. Though student activists attempted artifacts of engagement that "did not stick" (e.g., #PostYourStateOfMind), CS1950's persistence, along with a recursive circulation of offline and online communication, nourished their advocacy.

This leads to the power of the ecological chronology as a method for SM2.0 scholars embracing collective identity theory. Along with allowing a rich, comprehensive view of the artifacts of political engagement, the ecological chronology encourages us to hold the paradox of ecology as a unit of analysis that is constantly in flux,¹³³ a process and product of mediated and immediate communication.¹³⁴ The ecological chronology also spotlights the turning points activists face, particularly as forces of de- and/or re-contextualization affect the consequential spreading of a collective identity. In the case of CS1950, the decision of athletes of color, then the entire MU Tiger football program, to boycott all football-related activity made MU a topic for sports talk radio, not only a matter for "concerned students." We are not certain how, or even if, student activists could have prevented the growth of their ecology to national, and even international attention (or, frankly, if they would have wanted to). But the ecological chronology raises questions: What happens when the radical potential of a communicative ecology spills over the edges of activists' sphere of influence? How might those who identify with a collective respond to a de-contextualization, particularly one that disempowers their narrative?

This leads to the significance of the events of November 9, 2015, which beg questions of whether Black student activists (who face grave danger on campus) should be allowed *space* and *time* to commune and process; and whether journalists' right to access anybody, at any time, trumps all other values and rights. We believe that grappling with these questions may prompt a reflexive review of ways that libertarian standards are complicit with whiteness and even with racist attitudes; it may move folks to consider whose free expression on campus matters more (the expression of anti-racist advocates or of gaslighting white supremacists, for instance, who seek to test the limits of free speech on campus). We find it encouraging that platforms like Facebook are being held accountable for proliferating hate speech, but encourage readers (especially those near or working at college campuses) to consider how to promote safe and brave spaces. We also hope

¹³¹Joel Penney and Caroline Dadas, "(Re) Tweeting in the Service of Protest: Digital Composition and Circulation in the Occupy Wall Street Movement," *New Media & Society* 16, no. 1 (2014): 74–90; Reich, *Toxic Politics*.

¹³²Myers and Hamilton, "Social Media as Primary Source: The Narrativization of Twenty-First-Century Social Movements."

¹³³Mercea, Iannelli, and Loader, "Protest Communication Ecologies," 2016.

¹³⁴Treré and Mattoni, "Media Ecologies and Protest Movements: Main Perspectives and Key Lessons."

that as student activists hail Black Power and Civil Rights activists in their current work—evident in #ConcernedStudent1950’s name, the LBC’s iconography and emoji—prior attempts to defuse activism through “American values” like free speech will be apparent, and more easily combatted by today’s anti-racist activists.

While the end of this story is still being written, we celebrate with @justbeying, whose post on November 12, 2015 represents the consequentiality of CS1950’s activism: “Reflecting on these past two weeks. Mizzou...we did this! I love the community we’re building. My heart is so full” (see fig. 13).



Fig. 13. CS1950 celebration tweet. Tweet by @justbeying. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/justbeying/status/665025362150076417>

The inspiring images of students taking over the MU quadrangle stand as a testament to Black student activists’ ability to clear space for justice and interracial community (rather than racism and hate), with the help of social media to make sense of (and grow) their collective identity. We are inspired by the potential of student activism (mediated through a complex ecology), and hope that others may follow CS1950’s example of fomenting consequential rhetoric.