

## POINTS OF INTEREST

Introduction to Columbia: The Missouri city of Columbia,<sup>1</sup> located in Boone County,<sup>2</sup> is home to the University of Missouri<sup>3</sup> as well as Columbia College and Stephens College. The city lies in the heart of the state, almost equidistant from Kansas City (127 miles to the west) and St. Louis (124 miles to the east).

- Historic Old Southwest Neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> The magazine of the Mizzou Alumni Association notes that this an eclectic area west of the University of Missouri campus that “shelters many MU Professors,”<sup>5</sup> local professionals and some old-money Columbia

<sup>1</sup> Little Dixie, they used to call this area, this region consisting of between six to seventeen counties in the middle part of Missouri. Named Little Dixie because here the attitudes and beliefs aligned with those of the antebellum South. In this region slave populations went as high as fifty percent with the largest percentages belonging to plantations close to the Missouri River.

<sup>2</sup> While the exact boundaries have been up for debate, there are six counties considered to be the “heart” of Little Dixie—Audrian, Callaway, Howard, Monroe, Randolph, and Boone. During the “nadir” of race relations, the period of history between the end of Reconstruction through to the early twentieth century, there were thirteen lynchings of black men in these counties. At least two of them happened not just in Boone County but in Columbia.

<sup>3</sup> You left Boston, where you’d lived for the past ten years, and moved to Columbia for a graduate program. You are hoping for a fresh start.

<sup>4</sup> The “professorial ghetto” a professor will jokingly explain early on in your time here.

<sup>5</sup> You’ll take a class with this professor. Only one. A few weeks before it begins, a friend of yours in the program will come to you and explain how she’s got a funny story to tell. She was in his office and they were looking at the photos of the people in the class.

“What photos?”

“The ID ones. They’re the ones on the roster.”

She says that he showed her the list. They were going down it and when he got to your photo he stopped and said, “Look at her face. Look at that one. She’s going to be trouble. Just you watch.”

“What the hell? Why would he say that?”

“Oh come on. It was just a joke. It’s because of your photo, your face.”

families.”<sup>6</sup>

- Tate Hall. Named for Lee H. Tate, a graduate who died in World War I. It is located on Conley Avenue, adjacent to Jesse Hall on the University of Missouri campus. The building has been recently renovated. Before Tate Hall housed the English department <sup>7</sup>it was once home to the school of law.<sup>8</sup>

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“What about my photo? What about my face makes me look like I’m trouble?”

She will laugh off your concern, change the subject, but apparently there is something wrong with your face. Your expression too harsh. Perhaps it’s because you don’t smile as often as you should, or because you don’t uptalk at the end of your sentences and so every word uttered is implied as being angry. It’s because you’re too quiet, that you take too long to think, to articulate, and in the span of time between what you want to say and what you actually do say others’ perceptions of you changes. Your pause for clarity turns into a pause of judgment.

So you are always revising—how you should act, what you should say, how you should be. You continue being silent. You accommodate. You make the smallest version of yourself you could possibly make but still it’s never enough because your face is still your face and no matter how you’re seen that will never change.

<sup>6</sup> A gathering for new students is being held at another professor’s house. You’re still unfamiliar with the area and even with GPS you’re not sure which unmarked house it’s supposed to be. You think, well if you could just get out and—and what? Stand on the sidewalk waiting? Go up to a house and hope it’s the right one? And what if it isn’t? So instead you sit in the car and stare down this tree-lined street full of historic homes and wait, hoping someone will finally come along that you recognize.

Then later at the gathering when you tell this story and explain your worry, your fear of accidentally showing up unannounced at a stranger’s home, someone will interrupt you.

“Oh you can’t be serious,” she’ll respond.

<sup>7</sup> Your office is in the basement of this building. You remember how before classes had started you’d gone to find it. You stopped and took in a deep breath when you saw the sign with your name. It was something as simple as your name typed on a piece of paper letting you know that this space was yours. It didn’t matter that the desk would be shared with another person, that your office space was in the back of the room in the very farthest corner. What mattered to you then was that you could look at this paper, see your name, and know how far you’d come.

<sup>8</sup> In 1936, an African American man named Lloyd Gaines applied for admission to the law school. At the time of his application, only whites were admitted to the university. Gaines applied and received interest from admissions, but after the university learned of Gaines’ race from his transcripts he was denied admission. In response Gaines sued the university, claiming that his right to “equal protection of the laws” under the Fourteenth Amendment had been violated. The United States Supreme Court ruled in Gaines’ favor, upholding that the school either had to provide a separate law school or admit blacks to the university.

- Intersection of Stewart Road and Providence Road. If driving down Providence, on the right at this intersection is the entrance to the Katy Trail.<sup>9</sup>
- Faurot Field. Named in honor of longtime coach Don Faurot. Faurot Field is located at Memorial Stadium. It's the home field for the Missouri Tigers,<sup>10</sup> the University of Missouri's football team where Gary Pinkel is the head coach.
- Traditions Plaza. Traditions Plaza is located in the heart of campus on the Carnahan Quadrangle.<sup>11</sup> Traditions Plaza is also across

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Gaines disappeared on March 19, 1939, a year after his landmark case. He left his apartment to buy postage stamps, or so he told a friend, and then vanished. He was twenty-eight years old, the same age you were when you moved to start this program.

<sup>9</sup> An old rail bridge used to be here but it's now gone. Once a man was lynched on that bridge. His name was James T. Scott. He was a janitor working at the MU medical school when he was accused and arrested of raping the white daughter of an MU German professor, Hermann Almstedt. While Scott was in jail a mob broke in, took him from his cell, and dragged him to this bridge where he was lynched.

Even now, there is no sign, no official marking of remembrance.

<sup>10</sup> You're in a student computer lab in another campus building where you teach. You're trying to print out an assignment for your class and you're doing it here because you are avoiding your office, avoiding the conversations from your cohort about the protests, avoiding their white guilt frustrations and concerns, avoiding their questions asking you for your black perspective. You're alone in this lab, or you were until you hear another person behind you come into the lab.

"It's all such a disaster. I don't know why the football players were protesting in the first place. Like why they even had to get involved. It's not their job to get involved," a woman says to someone on her phone. She's young, a student most likely, and she comes in and sits at a nearby table.

"Now who's going to come here? Who would even want to come here now? The school's reputation is ruined. Everyone is going to think we're all just a bunch of racists."

Your chest tightens. You feel the pressure from the stress and so you take a breath. You think about leaving, forgetting about the assignment, because you are tired and the last thing you want is to hear yet another conversation about what has happened, but instead you grit your teeth and tell yourself to finish.

"It wasn't all the football players," she says. "I wish everyone would realize that. It was just those—"

She stops, swallows. She looks over at you, suddenly aware of your presence. Go ahead and say it, you think. Just fucking say it.

"Let me call you back," she tells the person on the other line, then she gets up and leaves.

<sup>11</sup> A well-known writer comes to visit. You sit in a room with your cohort as this writer addresses what you wish you had the nerve to say—she talks about academic racism, the lack of diversity across the board, the microaggressions students

from Jesse Hall along Conley Avenue. The plaza was created in honor of MU's landmark 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

- Gateway Hall. Its name “combines the historic<sup>12</sup> past with MU as the first established university west of the Mississippi, along with the sustainable and socially innovative values the new hall will foster.” The building is newly constructed and is located on the southeast side of campus.
- Top Ten Wines. It is, according to their website, “one of Columbia’s most prominent wine venues, occupying a unique niche for wine enthusiasts in the area.”<sup>13</sup> Every Tuesday is known as Tapas

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of color often face, and the biases and stereotypes others who, despite believing themselves to be better, often perpetuate.

Across from you another minority student sits. “Yes,” she softly says with each statement made, and it becomes clear to both of you who this writer is addressing, but it is only clear to the two of you.

What you’ve noticed lately in the time since the protests is that there has been a disassociation between the response and its cause. We have moved on from this stain is the underlying consensus. Already, there is a sense of finality to the problem, but you are in a room in which you are one of a handful of minorities. When you look out at everyone else all you can see is another problem, one of many, and none of which anyone seems to want to face.

After this writer has finished one of them points to the window. “Out there was where the protests happened,” she says. “If you look really close you can kind of see the plaza.” You are struck by this action, in how she begins to talk about what had happened. Already, the events have become conversational fodder for tourists. It makes you wonder if in the future the university will do this as well. If in five years or ten it will be included in the campus tours. How much will be mentioned? How much, you wonder, will be erased?

<sup>12</sup> The poop swastika. For months it’ll be all anyone talks about—where it was, who saw it, whether it existed or was completely fabricated. Even your friend will ask, well how do we know since there’s not a photo? And you’ll have to remind her that there is, that there’s a police report, that it’s all easily accessible online. Never mind that this is not the only racist incident to have happened. Never mind that there is a history of reports of students being called slurs and of veiled threats on social media. Never mind about the cotton balls thrown on the lawn of the Black Culture Center. Never mind because what matters is that for this the doubt has been cast. It is the question that has come to matter. There is such an infatuation with the possibility of a falsehood that no one wants to stop and think about the implications of what it would mean if it were true.

<sup>13</sup> Three days before you have to take your oral exams. Three days and the walls of your apartment are cluttered with notecards push-pinned to corkboard. You’ve spent the past year reading the canon of African American literature and learning the weight of its history, and you are tired of the patterns you see, of the ways in which the past is continuously played out before your eyes. The world around you appears to be falling apart, and so you take a break, get your keys and you are out, out, out—at a bar forgetting, just having a moment, and after a few hours your shoulders relax and you really do forget about the fact that if you

Tuesdays where tapas are served with every wine, beer, or sangria purchase.<sup>14</sup>

- Gaines/ Oldham Black Culture Center. According to their mission statement, the Gaines/ Oldham Black Culture Center (GOBCC) is dedicated to providing social and educational programs that reflect the history, heritage and culture of the African Diaspora to all students, faculty, staff and the Mid-Missouri community.
- Jesse Hall. This is the main administrative building on campus.<sup>15</sup> Built in 1893 after Academic Hall burned to the ground, the building is one of the major symbols of the University. It is located at the south end of the David R. Francis Quadrangle, often called simply “The Quad.” Jesse Auditorium, a popular entertainment venue for touring acts, is located at the east end of the hall.
- Speaker’s Circle. Speaker’s Circle actually used to be known as Conley Plaza. Built in 1986, Conley Plaza was to be a concrete open space framed with seasonal flora from the school’s botanical garden. Later that year, a group of students constructed shan-

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were to turn on the television there would be your campus on full display.

<sup>14</sup> Then the threat comes. *I’m going to stand my ground tomorrow and shoot every black person I see.* Your students email you screen-capped images. *Some of you are alright. Don’t go to campus tomorrow.* You get an email from a friend. You get emails from your department. You get an email from the university.

Fear is like a fever, feel its heat running through your body as you quickly exit the bar and make your way down the street. Fear is what you’ll think as you walk to your car. It’s late, you’re one of the few people out. You do not run because there’s a part of you not wanting to overreact. It’s a prank, you’ll find out later, and even now you are telling yourself that it is just a prank, that no one could ever be serious in such a threat, and yet still you sit in your car unable to start the engine, unable to even move out of fear of being seen.

<sup>15</sup> Because it’s the main administrative building, the campus’s center, if you will, it will be the focal spot for a number of protest marches. Students will chant “Racism Lives Here,” as the crowds surrounding them become larger as their path of egress is blocked.

“I can’t get by. These fuckers,” you hear someone from behind you say. You have left your office and are on your way to class when you become blocked because of the march. You turn and look among the sea of faces for the person belonging to the comment but no one is talking now. Everyone stares straight ahead at the line. They grow impatient the longer it takes.

You close your eyes. You don’t want to see the faces of the other students, their barely contained expressions of anger and resentment. You don’t want to be reminded of your own guilt for not joining in, for continuing to stand there waiting because you are afraid. You are afraid of making yourself known.

It finally quiets down, and when you open your eyes again the crowd has passed. Students disperse. The moment, this one, is over, and as you look around you find that you are the only one left.

tytowns on the nearby quad in protest of the university's 127.5 million dollar investments in companies operating in South Africa during apartheid. The shantytowns stayed briefly before the university tore them down. The students built them again. For this act of civil disobedience the students were arrested.

- Eventually, the university would comply and divest their funds from connections to the apartheid government. In response to the protests the university president designated Conley Plaza as the only area on the campus where speakers didn't need to have permits.<sup>16</sup>
- Memorial Student Union. Memorial Union honors university men who lost their lives in service during World War I. Their names are inscribed on the inside walls of the tower archway. In a tradition dating back to a time when most men wore hats, whenever one walks beneath the archway they are to tip their hat as a sign of respect to their deceased brothers. Every student is also to speak at a whisper under the archway.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sometimes you'll catch one of the tours as you walk through this area on your way to teach a class. "It's one of the few areas in Missouri where you can practice free speech," one of the guides explains, but on another time you hear the person say that it is in the country. Both times you want to ask them what specifically they meant by their statements, but you are late and there's no time to ask for clarifications.

You remember how once you had a student meet with you to discuss a potential paper topic. He wanted to argue that Speaker's Circle wasn't an area of free speech, not really, because he felt afraid to be able to say what he wanted without repercussions.

"Well, what do you want to say?" you asked, and he wouldn't answer.

<sup>17</sup> This will be the first building on campus you'll go to. An orientation specifically for minority students with fellowships will be held in this building. You have what's known as the Gus T. Ridgel Fellowship, named after a man who was the first African American to earn a Masters degree at the university. Even though there's no building named after him, a room here has been and one of the meetings is held in it.

This fellowship—you almost didn't want to come here because of it, ashamed as you are to admit it. Despite the honor, you did not want to be labeled the minority with the scholarship.

"Girl, take that money," a family member will say when you call and ask her for advice, and so you accepted their offer. "They're still going to see you as black, money or no money, so you might as well take it and move on."

Years later, after you've been called the first slur and the second and then the third, you'll call up an old friend to tell him what happened. "You know," he'll say, "I never thought you should have gone there in the first place."

"Well," you'll say, thinking back to your family member's advice. "They

- Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity House. The Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity House is the oldest fraternity house on the University of Missouri campus.<sup>18</sup> Recognized as “The Grasslands,” the house was built in 1878 by George Bingham Rollins, the son of the founder of the University of Missouri.
- Strickland Hall. Formerly known as the General Classroom Building, Strickland Hall was constructed in 1969 to house classrooms for the social sciences.<sup>19</sup> In 2007, it was renamed “Arvarh E. Strickland Hall” in honor of professor emeritus and former interim Director of the Black Studies Program Arvarh E. Strickland. Dr. Strickland was MU’s first tenure-track, black professor.
- ~~Jake’s Market, Uncle B’s Ice House, Blue and White Cafe, Ginny Taylor’s Tavern and Grill, Richardson Shoe Repair, Alvin Coleman’s Liquor Store, Green Tree Club, Shook Herndon’s Tavern,~~

offered me the most money. What else was I supposed to do?”

<sup>18</sup> Once known as Grasslands Plantation, there is a campus rumor that the house is haunted.

“Perhaps it’s the ghosts of the slaves that worked the land,” you’ll respond when your students tell you this about the fraternity. “Maybe they’re wanting their reckoning.”

<sup>19</sup> My professor has to schedule a make-up class, changing the date to a Friday afternoon in this building. You get there early, beginning your slow climb up four flights of stairs to the room since the elevator will not go to the top floor. You have reached the top and are about to rest when a woman comes out the door. She looks at you and asks where you’re going.

“I have a class up here.”

“There are no classes up today.”

“Well,” and then you explain. She interrupts several times to ask for clarification—*Who is the professor? Oh, I know him. What class you say? What room? Oh, you don’t remember, okay what time is your class? Why did he reschedule the date? Why is no one else here with you?*

“I still can’t let you in here. This floor gets locked after a certain time and no one without a key can go on.”

You tell her okay, that you understand, even though you never asked her in the first place. She’s still unsatisfied with leaving you alone so she takes her phone out of her purse.

“I’m just going to call him and ask,” she says.

You stare at each other as it rings. The phone goes to voicemail and she leaves a message. She calls again. She calls once more.

“He’s not picking up,” she says.

She sits down on the steps, but the moment she’s settled there another student comes and she stands up. “Oh, okay,” she says. “I see now.” She smiles, nodding at you both, then leaves.

Later, in class, your professor will turn to you and ask about the phone calls. “I don’t understand, why did she care if you were there?”

“I don’t know,” you’ll say, shrugging, hoping he’ll move on.

~~Phil and William's Barber Shop, Britt's Pool Hall, Merle Slater's Place, Swanson's Plumbing, Miss Vi's Cafe, Coleman's Scrap Yard, Noble's Coal Yard, Lake's Barber Shop, Coleman Cleaners, Green's Funeral Home, Mota Ralph's Chicken and Rib Shack.<sup>20</sup>~~

Intersection of S. 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Conley Avenue. On one side of the crosswalk is Ellis Library.<sup>21</sup> On the other side is Tate Hall.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> These few blocks between Fifth and Sixth streets on both sides of Walnut were once the Sharp End District, an area where during the 1960's black businesses thrived. As part of what was known as "urban renewal" these businesses, along with well over sixty more, were all torn down and are now gone.

<sup>21</sup> After the protests, after you pass your comprehensive exams and you decide you are done with this place, you get up one Sunday morning to go to your office and collect your belongings. You stand on the side of the street waiting to cross when a car comes, a white SUV, speeding around the turn. You hold back and wait for the car to pass, and as it does one of them shouts at you before disappearing on down the road.

You don't need to explain the slur or how it felt to be called it. By now, the hurt should not be surprising, but still you feel the shock from it as you force yourself to cross the street, to continue on what you set out to do.

"You should tell someone," your friend says. "Campus safety. Call them now and tell them."

"What good would it do?" you respond.

"Because people should know this shit keeps happening," she says, "and because people still believe it doesn't."

<sup>22</sup> You are back in your office staring at the sign with your name. For a brief moment you think about ripping the sign in two, taking the paper and shredding it to pieces. It would give this act the closure you long for. You reach up and grab it, hold it in your hands. *No*, you think, *no*.

It is the memory of Gaines that makes you tape the sign back. It is what tells you to leave this, because it is a reminder of why you are here. Still though, you can't help but wonder if that's enough. After everything, is it enough you at least have this? Is it enough that you are here?