



A day of celebration and confusion

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COLUMBIA — UM System President Tim Wolfe resigned Monday morning, after weeks of mounting racial tension on campus.

It was clear the center of power had shifted. It was not clear whether anything else had.

Not far from MU's Traditions Plaza, a private party kicked into high gear next to the protesters' campsite. Their original four tents had swollen to at least 20 — blue canopies and mesh shelters and tables spread across the grass. This was no longer a small protest on public space.

Journalists from around the country lined the sidewalks, holding microphones and cameras. One photographer stood on top of the metal tiger statue to see the action at the center. The center was the place to be. Someone cranked up music and students began dancing. Some mobbed together in the center. Others stepped away and danced by themselves.

The reason they had space to dance, and the reason reporters from New York and Los Angeles and Columbia had to grab zoom lenses if they wanted a photo, was the ring of students on the edge of the grass, blocking entrance to the lawn. (One reporter even watched a protester, an older white woman, use a backpack to strike a student photographer trying to take a picture).

An opening was briefly created for Jonathan Butler, the student who ended his weeklong hunger strike the moment Wolfe resigned. Butler left the center surrounded by a crowd of supporters, pressed closer than the Secret Service walks to a president.

Then the ring closed again. In the center: mainly black students cheering, chanting and hugging. In the circle: white and black students with linked arms. On the outside: mainly white people.

The space between each group was wide.

Several yards away, a group of three white students stopped to watch the dancing with incredulous looks on their faces. One looked down at several small children sitting nearby. "You brought your children to this?" he said to himself.

Big institutions move slowly. But a former IBM executive became a former president just 38 hours after student athletes announced they were done with football as long as Wolfe kept his job.

The scene was like the Homecoming Parade protest a month ago.

In the center: President Wolfe and his wife, seated in the back of a shining red convertible. In the surrounding circle: black students with their arms linked, chanting and yelling. On the outside: onlookers, many white, many of whom seemed utterly perplexed by the scene in front of them.

The center had changed. The outside — not yet.