

**The Purpose of Place: The University of Missouri Campus, Identity, and Community**  
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The University of Missouri (Mizzou) website summarizes its history as follows:

“Established in 1839, the University of Missouri knows what it means to be first. We were the first public university west of the Mississippi River. We are home to the world’s first journalism school. We started the tradition of homecoming.”<sup>1</sup> The University’s mission statement, also on the official website, declares that “we are stewards and builders of a priceless state resource, a unique physical infrastructure and scholarly environment...”<sup>2</sup> It is clear from these excerpts of Mizzou’s official online presence that it values its past. Not only does it constantly celebrate a historical narrative of firsts, but it also capitalizes on this specific interpretation for branding, recruitment and retention, and alumni relations. To be a Mizzou Tiger means more than reciprocating “Z-O-U” when a stranger shouts “M-I-Z.” Shared pride in a unique university history—one which the school actively promotes—binds University of Missouri students, faculty, staff, and alumni together in a group identity.

Beyond the website, this Mizzou history is displayed and celebrated in places like its annual homecoming celebrations and its Thomas Jefferson statue and monument, but is also displayed in the “unique physical infrastructure”<sup>3</sup> mentioned in its mission statement. The spaces that compose Mizzou’s campus includes student housing, faculty offices, classrooms, and research labs, as well as green spaces, plazas, and roads. These spaces are also historically

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<sup>1</sup> “History of Mizzou,” Mizzou (Curators of the University of Missouri), accessed January 28, 2022, <https://missouri.edu/about/history>.

<sup>2</sup> “Mission and Values,” Mizzou (Curators of the University of Missouri), accessed January 28, 2022, <https://missouri.edu/mission-values>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

significant in their architecture, meaning, and memories that, together, contribute to the school's collective identity and place consciousness. Campus is the largest representation of Mizzou's history, but this is easily overlooked as the buildings and spaces serve contemporary purposes and, therefore, often do not seem historical. This paper argues that the built environment and place consciousness are underappreciated and understudied at the University of Missouri, specifically for their roles in collective identity and belonging.

Homecoming, the first journalism school, and the Truman the Tiger mascot define the University of Missouri against other institutions. These are among the shared traditions, experiences, and symbols which contribute to a group identity that binds students, faculty, and alumni together despite their vastly different majors, research interests, and locations. However, Mizzou's unique built environment equally identifies and defines it. People likely picture the columns and Francis Quadrangle, Jesse Hall's dome, and sometimes Memorial Union's gothic architecture as symbolic of Missouri's flagship institution. Of its sprawling botanical garden campus, Jesse Hall, the columns, and the surrounding Quad are members of the National Register of Historic Places. The buildings included in this area will likely never be demolished, nor altered against their historical integrity. They represent Mizzou's past, as former Board of Curators president G.F. Rothwell declared "let these columns stand, let them stand a thousand years" after Academic Hall burned in 1892.<sup>4</sup> These physical features are used to attract future students, serve as a symbol of shared experiences for alumni, and maintain a historical presence on campus. Mizzou's history is displayed in its campus, and I argue that this is predominantly

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Flandermeyer Worley, "175 Years, from 1839 to 2014," MIZZOU (MIZZOU Magazine, November 13, 2013), <https://mizzoumag.missouri.edu/2013/11/175-years-from-1839-to-2014/index.html>.

how the public and Mizzou community engage with the school's history most frequently, even if unbeknownst to them.

This paper contends that the University of Missouri's campus—its history and the choices made about its presentation, preservation, and symbolism— is a revealing case study in public history. It is the initial research into how important history is to university communities and how that history impacts ongoing conversations around collective identity and belonging common at universities today. To efficiently address this argument, this paper focuses on three interrelated factors at Mizzou: built environment names, how the built environment represents the school's history, and how it fits into discourse about belonging on college campuses. Ultimately, I find that while history is essential to Mizzou's branding, marketing, and identity, it is not really acknowledged or displayed beyond the Historic Quad. This contributes to a degree of historical illiteracy for those making decisions about the school and those attending the school, which then facilitates a cycle of inequality and exclusion, partially evident in who is represented and celebrated in the built environment.

For the purpose of this project, “main campus” is identified as the area most frequented by the public and the Mizzou community—understood as the students, faculty, staff, and administration. This includes the buildings and spaces between located between College Avenue, Elm Street, South Providence Road, and East Stadium Boulevard (not including the hospital and its associated structures). This area contains a majority of faculty and administrative offices, classrooms, student recreation and academic resources, and on-campus student living. It is where prospective students and their families, as well as visitors and alumni, gather for tours and events like homecoming. Essentially, this “main campus” is the center of the Mizzou community.

My research into who Mizzou campus spaces are named for considers those within this “main campus.” It is important to identify that the research for this paper is mainly concerned with buildings, and not on green spaces, plazas, and roads, which will eventually be incorporated. Currently an estimated twenty-four buildings are not named for people, but have general names, like Arts and Sciences, the Physics buildings, or South Residence Hall. These buildings comprise the largest group. Considering buildings named for people, research has so far revealed that the public is most likely to walk by or be in a building named for a white man—whether a former University president, professor, alumni, donor, or politician. That this is the dominant namesake group supports that it is also the history Mizzou prioritizes.

As discussed earlier, the nationally recognized buildings surrounding Francis Quadrangle are the dominant physical representations of Mizzou and the built environment features that it most protects and capitalizes on. Yet, their names also tell us about the history Mizzou prioritizes. Richard Jesse, David R. Francis, Colonel William F. Switzler, George Clinton Swallow, and John Pickard, for example, are all white men. That the most protected and prominent buildings on campus are named for this specific group of people matters. Overall, an estimated twenty-three buildings on “main campus” are named for former professors, deans, or directors, fifteen for previous administration leaders, nine for Missouri politicians, six after alumni, and six are named for local Columbia or Missouri residents or donors. Of these, nine bear women’s names (ten if we count Cornell Hall which is named for a married couple), four are named for African Americans, and one for an Asian-American. Over fifty buildings in this “main campus” area are named for white men, while around fourteen are not.<sup>5</sup> Not only does this reveal who administration and donors deem important in Mizzou history, but it also insinuates to

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<sup>5</sup> To view my current research, see: Jordan Pellerito, “A Campus to Come Home To,” ArcGIS StoryMaps ( Esri, December 11, 2021), <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6b2425ba2db849bcb331e7daced8690d>.

the public who the ideal Mizzou Tiger is: a white man. Every day, prospective and current students and visitors walk by and in buildings commemorating a very specific group.

Among the white men's names representing the University of Missouri's history to the public are multiple enslavers, a Confederate officer, and a staunch segregationist. William Clark and James Rollins, for example, both enslaved African Americans—around twelve and thirty people, respectively.<sup>6</sup> William Hatch, a U.S. Representative from Missouri later in his life, was a Confederate Lieutenant Colonel during the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> Frederick Middlebush—the namesake of a colloquially-known general education building—is the longest-serving president of the University, but was also integral in maintaining segregation at Mizzou and in denying Lloyd Gaines, and African American man, admission to the law school in 1935.<sup>8</sup> More research is required for the other namesakes on campus, but memorializing even these four individuals questions whose history the University of Missouri prioritizes.

This purpose of this project is not to vilify Mizzou's history, but to question how the University chooses to use its past in the built environment, and how that factors into the collective identity. While Mizzou does not necessarily hide the information about figures and policies, like Clark and Rollins enslaving people, Hatch leading Confederate troops, and Middlebush's segregationist stronghold, it is also not included in the University-promoted historical narrative or directly mentioned on the official website. This is worth investigating in terms of marketing and symbolism, but also in how the history displayed, marked, and

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<sup>6</sup> Jay H. Buckley, *William Clark: Indian Diplomat*, University of Oklahoma Press. (2008), p. 20.; Elizabeth Uhlig and Todd Barnett, "James S. Rollins," SHSMO Historic Missourians (State Historical Society of Missouri, March 8, 2021), <https://historicmissourians.shsmo.org/james-rollins>.

<sup>7</sup> Unknown, "Col. Hatch Dead," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 24, 1896.

<sup>8</sup> F 24-36, *Frederick A. Middlebush Papers* (C0133); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia.

memorialized across campus impacts Mizzou's collective identity and sense of belonging for different groups. That campus buildings bear these names without contextualization or any information—that their history is not openly acknowledged and displayed on campus—is a disservice to the current Mizzou community. The population frequents buildings, like Middlebush Hall, that commemorate individuals unworthy of the school's core values: respect, responsibility, discovery, and excellence. What does it indicate about the past and identity that Mizzou prioritizes if its African American students attend a campus permanently celebrating William Hatch and Frederick Middlebush? If it plans to demolish the first building for women on campus?

A prominent example of how the University of Missouri is selectively shaping its historical narrative and priorities is evident in the recent decision to demolish several historic buildings on campus, specifically Read Hall. Built in 1903, eight years after Jesse Hall and thirty-six years after women's admission, Read Hall originally served as the first women's dorm at the University. Though not named for a woman, but for the male university president who admitted white women in 1867, Read Hall's historical significance is on par with the likes of Jesse Hall not just for its androcentric representation of female students, but also for its architecture and many purposes throughout Mizzou's history. It was the first collegiate gothic building on campus and inspired the remainder of "white campus" or "historic women's campus." Read Hall's architecture also helped pioneer the collegiate gothic revival in colleges and universities across the United States: Yale and Princeton—schools often revered for their historic significance in American higher education—soon constructed similar buildings with the same architect, and those buildings remain in use on their campuses today. Aside from the first women's dorm, Read Hall also served as a hospital during the 1918 influenza pandemic,

Mizzou's first student center, and The Maneater student newspaper headquarters. Read Hall is where some of the first female students lived and socialized, where student nurses tended to their sick peers, where student organizations met and the university president hosted coffee hours with students, where First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited, and where academic attractions, such as The Maneater, once lived.<sup>9</sup>

Many college campuses across the country, especially the "Ivy League" institutions like Yale and Princeton, have what I call an "academic aesthetic" that attracts students and faculty. It is not misguided to say that architecturally cohesive campuses portraying feigned history or institutional longevity in comparison to Britain's Oxford and Cambridge create an academic "feeling" from the built environment that is important to higher education communities. For example, Mizzou's homecoming parade, which follows generally the same route by Read Hall and "historic women's campus" each year, creates a sense of place that alumni returning home recognize. The appeal of colleges and universities is not just in their academic offerings, but also in their academic aesthetic—do students, faculty, and visitors feel that they are in a learning and research environment when on campus? Do they "feel" like they are at college?

While newer buildings are aesthetically attractive in their own right, the historical weight of older buildings, like Mizzou's collegiate gothic structures, contribute to a university's collective identity through shared experiences. These older buildings construct an academic aesthetic in their complimentary cohesiveness, but also contribute to the feeling of shared experiences with several generations of students. In one sense, this academic aesthetic is priceless in the appeal and group identity it provides the University. Yet it is also costly to

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<sup>9</sup> For information about Read Hall's history, see Bailey Martin's conference paper in this panel, "Welcoming Women: Read Hall, Marginalized Students, and Belonging at the University of Missouri" and University Archives, "Read Hall," MU in Brick and Mortar - Read Hall - General Information (University Archives, Curators of the University of Missouri, 2006), <https://muarchives.missouri.edu/historic/buildings/read/general.html>.

maintain if not prioritized, and even more expensive to construct from scratch. Mizzou plans to demolish many of these collegiate gothic buildings in the next decade, while schools like Missouri S&T, overseen by the same Board of Curators as Mizzou, recently announced multi-million dollar plans to create an academically aesthetic campus. Missouri S&T's director of design stated that "the goal is to create a campus that is really fitting of our academic reputation, and something that will ultimately attract people to the university."<sup>10</sup>

Considering its previous purposes and architectural style, it is not an exaggeration to say that Read Hall is as historically significant to the University of Missouri as the Francis Quadrangle buildings preserved and maintained by their National Register of Historic Places status. It is also not unfair to question the building's name and the current administration's intent to demolish it, the latter, of course, taking precedent. That Read Hall is named for former President Daniel Read, who admitted female students, is another example of how the University has reflected its favorable historical narrative and ideal Mizzou Tiger to students and visitors since 1903: the first woman's dorm was not named for a female student or graduate, but for the man who decided to allow women access to higher education at the University. Yet most passersby would still not know about the building's significance or its namesake due to a lack of public history at the University.

Aside from some buildings in the historic quad that bear plaques detailing construction dates and original purposes, there is no historical context provided around campus buildings. This means there is no way for the public to engage with the University's history beyond the condensed history page on the official Mizzou website. This could help explain why Mizzou

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Ahl, "Missouri S&T Will Move Forward on Campus Improvements," STLPR (St. Louis Public Radio, November 27, 2021), <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/education/2021-11-27/missouri-s-t-will-move-forward-on-campus-improvements>.



administrations are willing to demolish historic structures, like Read Hall, and unaware of what Hatch, Clark, and Middlebush represent—perhaps they do not know their own university’s complex history. Indeed, few people know about Read Hall’s significance or figures like Rollins, and that is not for lack of importance, but because the information is not included anywhere other than un-official Mizzou websites or student research. This is the case for most Mizzou “main campus” buildings. It is also probable that Read Hall, specifically, does not fit the University’s preferred historical narrative. Though named after a male University leader, which adheres to the traditionally promoted University history, Read Hall is central to women’s history. Both of these possible conclusions warrant a discussion on public history on college campuses.

University campuses are not just designated learning spaces. Students and faculty spend much of their professional and person time in these spaces. Visitors and prospective students take official guided tours or wander through campuses to “get a feel” for the school’s character and environment. The architectural appeal of structures like Jesse and Read Hall contribute to an academic aesthetic learning environment that gracefully ages the University of Missouri as the first university west of the Mississippi, but also lends it the historic weight of Oxford. Words like “Rollins,” and “Middlebush” are central in Mizzou’s collective identity as places many people have shared memories or meanings. Read Hall is symbolic of women on campus today. Yet the historical relevance of architecture, a building’s name or its original purpose remains unknown to the public and the collective without proper context.

Public histories give meaning to places.<sup>11</sup> Campus buildings, in their names, architecture, and significances serve as the most constant and stable representation of a university’s history in an environment that otherwise experiences frequent population turnover. Students, faculty,

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<sup>11</sup> David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory.” *The Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (1996): 7-23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377910>, 17.

administration, and alumni celebrate being “Mizzou Made” but few know what actually makes Mizzou aside from college football and homecoming weekend. That Mizzou celebrates homecoming and thousands of alumni return to campus once a year is a perfect representation of how historical consciousness and place consciousness are intertwined.<sup>12</sup> Alumni attach individual and shared memories to sorority and fraternity houses, the student center, the football field, the quad, and the cramped classrooms they spent many general education classes in. There is the history created by the Mizzou collective identity and there is the history the University promotes, which are very similar. However, these histories may be better considered heritages as they are emotional recollections equally formed by forgetting and remembering. Historians and public histories could mediate these with history and provide important context around campus, which may then absorb into the collective identity and be part of important conversations around who and what represents the University of Missouri. For instance, we cannot know what “Rollins” means to the Mizzou collective identity beyond its meaning as a location until that community is provided the historical context to consider it.

As mediators of academic historical research and the public’s memories, heritages, and understandings of the past, public historians can and should contribute to these scholarly conversations, in this case, at universities. Identifying and explaining why certain buildings are preserved and deemed historic, while others are not, as well as their names and purposes, are underappreciated aspects of collective identity on college campuses. Public historians are needed on university campuses to lead the process of placemaking in the pursuit of guiding the public to recognize the history around them in the built environment, as well as identify memories

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

attached to these locations and the broader economic and social factors that shaped the buildings' structures, names, and purposes.

With the history Mizzou prioritizes and promotes, as evidenced by the campus building names just discussed, we must ask whose version of the past it represents and how it matters today. Mizzou's dominant historical narrative of notable firsts and academic prestige can be viewed as a product of its cultural hegemon—the administration—and supported by the collective identity. Perhaps it is obvious that the administration and university leaders exert the most influence over this narrative, or that students and alumni condone it with their power in remembering and forgetting. However, this narrative is, in its own way, a public history used for marketing, recruitment, and fundraising. The past 183 years are condensed into short, accessible blurbs online much like plaques in museums or historic house museums. This presents Mizzou's history in a way that guides readers through basic and broad facts as to allow anyone to relate to it. On one hand, this could be “good” public history, but on the other, it could be disingenuous and a disservice to a community that increasingly includes groups today that are generally excluded or oppressed in that history.

One environment can have several conflicting meanings for different social groups, but this concept is not displayed at the University of Missouri. While a collective identity connected through a shared education, environment, and traditions is undeniably important for college communities and marketing, it is increasingly apparent in today's world that so is acknowledging the disparate experiences of social groups—past and present. Mizzou is no exception to this, and actually provides a fascinating case study. Part of this ongoing process needs to consider how the University's built environment impacts collective identity and conflicting spatial meanings. We need to continue asking questions, like: how do campus spaces themselves contribute to the

collective identity of Mizzou? What do building names indicate about the past Mizzou prefers to promote? Based on its public history and collective identity, what of the built environment is historically significant to the University and what does this reveal about preservation and demolition choices on campus?

Black, queer, international, and female students, once completely barred from the University of Missouri, still struggle to feel welcome and equal on Mizzou's campus— to belong. Mizzou's past, whether in its leaders, policies, or traditions, have continued impact on these conversations today. The ongoing process of inclusion and equality in the Mizzou community could benefit from public history work. Contextualizing the built environment and namesakes may be a miniscule step in this process, but it is nevertheless an important part of achieving an inclusive University community and further proves historians' relevance to administration, marketing, and recruitment.