Crisis narrative and the paradox of erasure: Making room for dialectic tension in a cancel culture

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1. Introduction

From April 1-2, 2019, students led by the Black Student Advisory Council and Basic Needs Campaign, some lethargic and light-headed after more than a week on a hunger strike, occupied Main Building on the University of Kentucky (UK) campus and refused to leave until the University met their demands (Parks, 2019). Demands included strategies to address food and housing insecurity among students, permanent seats for underrepresented racial and ethnic persons on administrative search committees, and removal of a 38-by-11-foot mural which chronicles the history of Kentucky from the walls of Memorial Hall.

The mural—a fresco painted into the wall in 1934 by artist Ann Rice O’Hanlon as part of the Public Works of Art Project in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal—is considered an important historical and artistic artifact (Blackford, 2015a, 2015b). It has also been a source of controversy for decades (Fowler, 1988). The mural includes images of Black workers bent over a tobacco field, Black musicians playing for white dancers, and a Native American with a tomahawk lurking behind a tree. In 2015, the University shrouded the mural as “a time-out” and established a campus task force to commission a second artwork to add context to the mural (Hale, 2017b). In 2018, the new companion art installation by artist Karyn Olivier recreated the offending images from the mural and placed them on a gold leaf dome surrounded by a quote from abolitionist Frederick Douglass: “There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him” (Hale & Wells, 2018, para. 9).

For protesting students, that was not enough. Tsage Douglas, chair of the UK Black Student Advisory Council, stated, “The only solution is to tear that mural down. We don’t care about structural integrity. We don’t care about preserving the art. It needs to come down. It needs to stop being celebrated immediately” (Watkins, 2019, para 12–13). As part of the negotiation to end the occupation, University President Eli Capilouto agreed to cover the mural for a second time. In September 2019, the University announced it would be closing Memorial Hall to all required classes. The 600-seat auditorium that had hosted lecture courses like anatomy and psychology for more than 90 years went dormant while the mural remained shrouded. In June 2020, following the police killing of George Floyd and the renewed surge of the Black Lives Matter movement, Capilouto announced in a campus-wide email that facilities would immediately begin the process of removing the mural in Memorial Hall. According to the email, “Our efforts and solutions with the mural, for many of our students, have been a roadblock to reconciliation, rather than a path toward healing” (Capilouto, 2020a, para. 18).

Consistent with existing research on art and public relations (see Xifra & Heath, 2018), this example shows that we must consider the reality that art can be perceived as a powerful communicative tool and a
source of both public relations agency and contest. As demonstrated by the UK Memorial Hall mural, works of art can become physical and literal sites of fervent contestations. Art that documents historical events, such as the O’Hanlon fresco, functions narratively to commemorate and to memorialize some worthy cause or events (be they tragic, fortunate, or valorous) (see Veil et al., 2011). However, evolving or alternative cultural interpretations of causes and events can challenge the fidelity of the narrative. Challenges to artwork’s narrative fidelity can take the form of groups of individuals, stakeholders, or publics both criticizing the established narrative and championing a counternarrative (see Heath & Waymer, 2019).

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Kentucky is hardly alone among universities that have faced controversy over artworks, monuments, or buildings whose imagery or whose honorees are dated or even offensive” (Hansen, 2018, para 3). Confederate statues have been removed at Duke University and pulled down by protesters at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Yale University renamed a residential college that had borne the name of John C. Calhoun, prominent politician and advocate of slavery in the antebellum South (Anderson, 2018). Meanwhile, Kentucky spent covering, uncovering, and adding context and companion artwork to the mural in an attempt to “provide a larger narrative of our history” (Capilouto, 2016, para 15). Even as the new artwork was unveiled “to tell a more complete story,” Capilouto (2018) recognized “the installation is not an exclamation point, but rather a comma—part of an ongoing dialogue” (para. 10).

Heath (2006) contends “one theme central to telling a story, an organization’s account for a crisis for instance, is that the narrative has to sustain itself under public scrutiny” (p. 246). He suggests that public relations practitioners need to “know the rhetorical problems and strategic response options that are part of telling a story which may be reported through various media, including the Internet” (p. 246). How the organization’s narrative is framed by the media and supported or contradicted by prominent voices in competing narratives “either helps or hurts the organization’s reputation/image and its relationships with its customers and key publics” (p. 246). Thus, just as the narrative of the Memorial Hall mural has been contested and has subsequently evolved, so too has the University’s narrative in response to student protests of the mural been contested and, as a result, evolved.

This study examines the evolving narratives surrounding the UK Memorial Hall mural. We view the case through the lenses of narrative theory, dialectical tensions, and the paradox of erasure while recognizing the challenges organizations face navigating the limited space for competing narratives in a “cancel culture.” Since a narrative must “sustain itself under public scrutiny” (Heath, 2006, p. 246), we rely on the media’s frame of the crisis as primary case evidence by using news coverage of the mural controversy as the largest dataset. We triangulate that data by also including official university statements and emails, op-ed articles, open letters, and personal interviews with prominent voices from different perspectives of the controversy in the case evidence. In identifying the competing narratives and dialectic tensions of the crisis, we add to and codify a typology of erasure in public relations practitioners need to know the rhetorical problems and strategic response options that are part of telling a story which may be reported through various media, including the Internet.

**1.1. Crisis narratives and narrative analysis**

Due to the potential significant threats to reputational and financial assets associated with crises, scholars and organizational managers alike devote considerable attention to crisis anticipation and mitigation (Olaniran & Williams, 2008). No matter how good an organization’s efforts might be, some crises are inevitable and demand rhetorical sensitivity to navigate (Heath, 2004b). Heath (2004a) proclaimed that crises create rhetorical problems that demand that the organization suffering the crisis “understand and respond to the various kinds of sense that are being made” (p. 249) about both the crisis event and perceptions about decisions the organization made (or did not make) that contributed to the onset of crisis. As Waymer and Heath (2007) noted, crisis events are interruptions in an organization’s narrative of control whereby various stakeholders and even less powerful, emergent agents who are affected by the crisis have an opportunity to share their narrative account of events leading to the crisis. These narratives grow and develop overtime, often without notice or acknowledgement from the offending organization. Research shows “most crises are neither accidental nor sudden...Not only does the problem exist, someone in the organization knows, or has neglected to learn, of its existence” (Millar, 2004, pp. 28–29). In the particular circumstances featuring the case as the largest dataset. We triangulate the media competing narratives in a context and companion artwork to the mural in an attempt to “provide a larger narrative of our history” (Capilouto, 2016, para 15). Even as the new artwork was unveiled “to tell a more complete story,” Capilouto (2018) recognized “the installation is not an exclamation point, but rather a comma—part of an ongoing dialogue” (para. 10).

As Heath and Palenchar (2009) argued, issues never die but might lie dormant until some spark reignites the issue and propels it back to current, relevant status or a critical stage where the issue demands resolution. In 2020, on the heels of the shooting deaths of Ahmad Arbei and Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, was killed during an arrest in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by Derek Chauvin, a White police officer who knelt on Floyd’s neck for more than eight minutes while Floyd suffocated, handcuffed, on the ground. The graphic video of Floyd’s death spread around the world, leading to outrage and protests against systemic racism (see Waymer, 2021). In his announcement to remove the Memorial Hall mural, UK President Capilouto described George Floyd suffocating to death with a knee at his neck as a haunting image he cannot escape (Capilouto, 2020a). Scholars and practitioners would be wise to take into account issues of race in crisis preparation and response (Waymer, 2012). By incorporating these key societal factors of race that surrounded and reignedite the issue of the mural, we are able to provide greater depth and more nuance to our analysis of the competing narratives.

Narratives, rather than simply recounting events, can be used as an effective tool to illuminate various aspects of a culture. By analyzing narratives methodologically, researchers can glean a clearer understanding of the culture that produces, constitutes, and surrounds the narrative (Bishop, 2001). Narratives “give collective social life meaning [and] enable us to understand the actions of others” (Desantis & Morgan, 2004, p. 321). Analyzing narratives provides researchers with the means to examine a fundamental process by which societal and institutional structures are continuously (re)created, resisted, complied with, and accommodated within fields of interest-driven discourses (Mumby, 1987). Thus, narratives, as told through monuments and other works of art, can be sociopolitical and power-centered.

For example, monuments, symbols, artwork, buildings, and landmarks memorializing Confederate leaders in the U.S. ignored that the Confederate States lost the U.S. Civil War; yet monuments honoring the defeated soldiers served as a source of intimidation to Black persons (read power over Black persons) living in those states that they were to remain subservient to the White leaders who maintained power despite losing the war (Heath & Waymer, 2019). The monuments served as a narrative articulation and covert reminder to marginalized Black persons and defeated White Southerners that the “Lost Cause” was a righteous cause, the U.S. Civil War was not over, and Southern Confederate States shall rise in terms of power and prominence again (Heath & Waymer, 2019).

In another example, Waymer and Heath (2019) highlighted in their study of monuments in Rome how the Roman Catholic Church strategized and modified the use of monuments as a means to proclaiming victory over the formerly most dominant empire in the world and demonstrating the Church’s power globally. Such changes to the monuments provided the Roman Catholic Church with a new vehicle to tell continuously a narrative of the influence, reach, and might of the Church. Even though an individual or entities can create a memorial or work of art without the “exertion of power” motive, publics’ differing perceptions of what the art communicates can lead to contestation and politicizing of the work. In this way, narratives, even
those told via art, often are political.

As collectives argue against the prevailing narrative associated with the artwork, they highlight that creators sometimes purposefully ignore pertinent issues and details (often linked with marginalized groups) that are present at the time when the artwork was created. For example, showing slaves happily serving their masters ignores the harsh and humiliating reality of slavery. As such, artwork that serves as a monument for a time and place can facilitate denial and cultural forgetting (see Hasian, 2004)—and eventually they can become sites of contestation as battles over the interpretation of the narrative ensue (Veil et al., 2011). The vital question is not how one can control a narrative but, rather, how one can work with others, including journalists and interested publics, “to tell a story that exhibits factual accuracy and narrative coherence” (Heath, 2006, p. 248), particularly when the competing narratives are polarizing.

1.2. Dialectical tensions

Introduced in an interpersonal context (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and extended to organizational contexts (Mumby, 2005), relational dialectics theory proposed that contradictions are inherent in relationships and organizations. Dialectical contradictions reflect “the coexistence and conflict of interpenetrated opposites” (Rawlins, 1989, p. 159), which create tensions, the “dynamic interplay and articulation together of opposites (e.g., control and resistance)” (Mumby, 2005, p. 23). These tensions manifest during organizational crises because of their effects on organizational relationships (Littlefield, 2015).

When we view crisis from the perspective of dialectical tensions, we accept that meaning comes from the expression of competing voices. Sellnow (2015) suggested “The dialectical tensions framework reveals the importance of attending to rather than silencing these competing voices” (p. 140). The ultimate test of the dialectical tension framework, however, is when an issue or crisis reaches a point when one of the many competing voices or sides views the issue/crisis situation as a zero-sum game. For example, if a monument or piece of art is a visceral reminder of slavery, bondage, subjugation, and marginalization, those offended publics might feel that erasure—the removal of the offensive artifact—is the only viable solution and use their voices to develop that narrative. On the other hand, other voices might present a narrative that works of art, even if offensive in contemporary times, deserve to be preserved.

Early crisis communication research and practice focused on finding and prescribing ways crisis managers can successfully respond to technological failures, acts of malevolence, or natural disasters to minimize loss, minimize organizational blame, and to resume normal business operations as efficiently and quickly as possible (see Lerbinger, 1997). Such an approach to crisis management, however, did not adequately address the nuances of crises that involve dialectical tensions—especially those with sensitive issues such as race at their core. In response to this shortcoming in research and practice, key, status-of-the-field publications, such as the Handbook of Risk and Crisis Communication (Heath & O’Hair, 2009) and the Handbook of Crisis Communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2010), have emphasized the need for scholars to move beyond the managerial bias of how organizations manage crises and account for the multiple stakeholders impacted by crises (Sellnow, 2015). This more inclusive approach to crisis management is important because “a much more comprehensive view of multiple and competing voices reveals the true nature of a crisis” (Sellnow, 2015, p. 143) while simultaneously offering researchers “lessons related to audience analysis, the need for a situational focus, paradoxical demands of openness, failures in sensitivity, and attending to multiple voices” (p. 140).

Relationship management is a dominant paradigm in public relations research. Maintaining relationships is also a central component of dialectical tensions research. According to Littlefield (2015), relational dialectics’ theoretical frameworks are “based on a process whereby competing perspectives are engaged in a discursive struggle to arrive at a point of understanding in order to maintain the relationship” (p. 3). The framework seeks to engage rather than silence competing narratives. How then does an organization that wants to preserve a relationship with a marginalized public do so when prominent voices in that public advocate for silencing competing narratives? This probing question on dialectic tensions leads us to a discussion of a relevant paradox: the strategy of erasure.

1.3. Erasure paradox

Viewing monuments and other works of art as narratives that can be and are often politicized helps to explain why on one hand some proponents of certain works of art fight to preserve the ideals and symbolic meanings of “worthiness to commemorate” they convey, while on the other hand opponents of those works of art fight to condemn them—such as Confederate monuments in the U.S.—and try to disrupt the continuity of the narrative the art communicates. In this way, these opponents enact the historical practice of damnatio memoria—a Latin phrase that means “condemnation of memory”—in their attempts to erase or destroy the art as a means of preventing the current or previous values and accomplishments commemorated by the artwork from living on in memory (Waymer & Heath, 2019).

Waymer and Heath (2019) described this “strategy of erasure” as “ostensibly paradoxical: to promote, commemorate, alter, and even expunge details that co-create the public memory” (p. 2). While memory is understudied conceptually in public relations, memory is essential to the enterprise because public relations plays a pivotal role in what is remembered, how it is remembered, and how memories guide current and future dialogue, decision-making, and organizational and societal priorities (Veil et al., 2011; Waymer & Street, 2015).

Paradoxically, public relations can be used by organizational actors to also challenge established memories—even attempt to erase them. Waymer and Heath (2019) deem such efforts of erasure as paradoxical because they argue that memory works much like the metaphorical Wunderblock toy (the forerunner to the Etch A Sketch)—an argument made popular by Sigmund Freud. The Wunderblock (also referred to as the mystic writing pad) included a stylus, a wax tablet, and a sheet of cellophane. By lifting the cellophane sheet, previous writing fades—ready for new writings and images; however, a faint trace of the original writings remains—forever etched on the wax tablet. Freud’s theory of memory argued that just as images drawn on the Wunderblock never are fully erased, impressions on the mind can never be erased fully.

If our minds indeed work like the Wunderblock, why then is the public relations strategy of erasure so prevalent? We tear down monuments that offend groups (an act of activist public relations), remove busts of disgraced celebrities who have committed shameful acts (an act of image maintenance/repair for the entertainment industry) and delete the records and accomplishments of tarnished athletes to demonstrate authority/narrative of control (an act of issues management for their associated athletic organizations). Despite these strategies, typically enacted by large and powerful political, societal or industry organizations, portions of society will never forget the removed statue, the contributions of the fallen celebrity, or watching the once-triumphant athletes perform. The act of erasure is paradoxical in that the removal of the artifacts leaves behind an impression not just of the original memories but also the active attempts to erase those memories. As such, the attempts to remove the tarnished images actually increase the notoriety of the subject’s accomplishments and their fall from grace.

Our purposes for exploring the competing narratives in this particular crisis case are two-fold: first, it allows us to extend, theoretically, the paradox of erasure into a crisis communication context—whereby we demonstrate that the erasure framework has broader applicability than historical studies, public memory studies, or image repair studies in public relations research and contexts. Specifically, this case provides a distinct example of marginalized publics initiating calls for erasure and using erasure both as public relations empowerment and as activism to (re)take power. We then find that both the university (a more powerful organization based on traditional notions of influence and power) and the
marginalized publics jointly call for *erasure as reconciliation*. Thus, we add to and codify a typology of erasure in public relations. Then, using narrative and dialectical tension theoretical frameworks and a more critical lens, we conclude with recommendations for universities dealing with crises that have competing interpretations of highly charged, socio-political issues, such as those stemming from racial injustice, at their center. With this purpose established, we present the research questions specific to the case.

2. Research questions

RQ1: What narratives surrounded the UK Memorial Hall mural throughout the controversy?

RQ2: Whose voices were amplified in the media coverage of the UK Memorial Hall mural?

RQ3: How does the analysis of the competing narratives around the UK Memorial Hall mural inform theory and praxis in dialectic tensions and erasure?

3. Methods

We used a case study approach, which enables researchers to make claims about a situation using multiple sources of evidence (Sellnow et al., 2009). Case study research analyzes a decision or set of decisions, including why and how strategies were implemented and with what result (Schramm, 1971). The method is appropriate for examining a broad range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues and should be conducted in a comprehensive applied manner (Yin, 2002) to derive practical implications (Patton, 2002). Yin (2009) suggests case studies are particularly useful when the research examines a current event by allowing “investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics” (p. 4).

We initiated a Google News search using the search terms “mural” and “University of Kentucky.” No date range was set in order to pull all available news articles. If an article included links to additional related texts that were not culled in the initial search, we included that evidence in the dataset as well. The search resulted in 94 original texts related to the case, including 59 news articles in *Herald Leader* (n = 10), *WUKY* (n = 7), *Kentucky Kernel* (n = 6), *Courier Journal* (n = 6), *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (n = 4), *WDRB* (n = 4), *National Coalition Against Censorship* (n = 3), *LEX18* (n = 3), *The Washington Post* (n = 3), *Inside Higher Ed* (n = 2), *The New York Times* (n = 1), *USA Today* (n = 1), *NBCNews* (n = 1), *ABC36* (n = 1), *WKMS* (n = 1), *The Kentucky Review* (n = 1), *Tristate Homepage* (n = 1), *Hypebeast* (n = 1), *Campus Reform* (n = 1), *Hyperallergic* (n = 1), and *The Art Newspaper* (n = 1); 13 opinion columns in the *Herald Leader* (n = 9), *Kentucky Kernel* (n = 1), *The Washington Post* (1), *Lancaster Farming* (n = 1), and *Northern Kentucky Tribune* (n = 1); four open letters submitted to the university from the faculty in African American and Africana Studies (Price et al., 2015) at UK (n = 2), the executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship (n = 1), and artist Karyn Olivier (n = 1); a documentary (n = 1); ten UK press releases (n = 10); five blog posts written by the university president (n = 5); and two emails from the university president to all students, faculty, and staff (n = 2).

After ordering all of the texts chronologically, the analysis process was guided by two specific tasks: creating a timeline of events and identifying prominent voices and narratives represented in the texts. The texts were read in their entirety to establish the timeline and gain a holistic sense of the case. The texts were then re-read to highlight direct quotes, opinions and official statements to “systematically ‘lift out’ patterns and arguments” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1532) that identify the prominent voices and narratives represented in the texts.

To provide additional context and better understand how the narratives were interpreted on campus, we conducted interviews with UK Spokesperson Jay Blanton and the UK Director of AAAS, Anastasia Curwood. The interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom and lasted between 40 and 46 min. Interviews began with broad questions about the mural to check our interpretation of the case, followed by more specific questions related to future plans for the mural. These questions allowed participants to describe events in their own words and clarify any misunderstandings of the narratives presented in the media coverage (Veil & Anthony, 2017). Interviews were transcribed and summaries were written describing each interview. Quotations from the interviews are included in the narrative analysis where they provided clarification of the context. We first offer a timeline of the case.

4. Case timeline

1934: Ann Rice O’Hanlon is commissioned as part of the Public Works of Art Project to paint a fresco of the history of Kentucky on the wall of UK Memorial Hall (Capilouto, 2016).

1970s: Since the mid-1970s, the University Administration has received complaints alleging racist overtones in the mural (Fowler, 1988).

2006: Senators of the UK student government passed a resolution to remove the mural. Then-UK President Lee Todd declined to take action (Blackford, 2015a).

2015: UK President Eli Capilouto covered the mural as a “time-out” after meeting with concerned students (Blackford, 2015a).

2017: The mural was unveiled once more, this time with information plaques providing context to the artwork (Capilouto, 2017).

2018: To create a dialogue about the mural, UK commissioned artist Karyn Olivier to create a new piece, called *Witness* (Hale & Wells, 2018).

2019: April — Students protested with a sit-in and hunger strike. The mural was covered a second time (Loosmore & Watkins, 2019). September — the University announced required classes would no longer be held in Memorial Hall (Blackford, 2019).

2020: June — UK announced it would remove the mural (Capilouto, 2020a).
5. Findings

Our analysis of the evidence elucidated six competing narratives throughout the evolution of the case. The voices amplified by the media coverage throughout the mural controversy included University President Eli Capilouto; University Spokesperson Jay Blanton; a number of student voices, most notably, Chair of the UK Black Student Advisory Council, Tsage Douglas; Director of the UK Art Museum, Stuart Horodner; AAAS Directors Melynda Price and Anastasia Curwood; and Artist Karyn Olivier. Each narrative is described using words drawn from the narrative. Supporting statements and quotations from the prominent voices in the controversy add to the description.

5.1. “A statement of history”

Since its creation in 1934, the UK Memorial Hall mural has been considered an important artifact. Completed by Lexington-born artist and UK art alumna Ann Rice O’Hanlon, the artwork was made possible by the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) established during the Great Depression. O’Hanlon’s work and other PWAP projects were part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal and marked the first time in history a federal government program supported art on a national level. At 38-feet wide and 11-feet tall, the mural is also considered the largest fresco ever painted by a woman in the U.S. (Jaschk, 2015).

Stuart Horodner, director of the UK Art Museum, suggested that the mural “tries to tell several stories about the origins of the Commonwealth. It is an ambitious, historical, and educational asset” (Blackford, 2019, para. 12). In 2006, when senators of the UK student government passed a resolution to remove the mural, then-UK President Lee Todd declined to take action on the resolution. The mural “is a statement of history, not a statement about our current values as an institution,” Todd said at the time. “It would be wrong to remove this work of art, just as it would be wrong to stop including in our history classes the terrible ramifications of slavery and the subjugation of Native Americans” (Blackford, 2015a, para 1–3).

UK President Eli Capilouto, who succeeded Todd, noted that the fresco “is considered by some to be one of the most important artworks of its kind in the commonwealth” (Jaschik, 2015, para. 4). Wendell Berry, a UK graduate who was related to O’Hanlon through marriage, wrote in an op-ed in 2015:

Ann painted the Memorial Hall fresco in 1934, when it took some courage to declare so boldly that slaves had worked in Kentucky fields. Nobody would have objected if she had let them out. The uniform clothing and posture of the workers denotes an oppressive regimentation. The railroad, its cars filled with white passengers, seems to be borne upon the slaves’ bent backs. (Berry, 2015, para 5)

The University has two other PWAP murals on campus on the east and west walls of the original browsing room of the Margaret I. King Library. “Work” and “Leisure,” painted by Frank W. Long in 1936, only depict White Kentuckians (UK Libraries, 2020).

Karyn Olivier, who created the companion artwork to the O’Hanlon mural in 2018, described the mural as “pretty progressive and potentially radical” by clearly depicting that America was built on back of African Americans (Anderson, 2018, para. 6). Olivier said that she thinks the mural’s take on slavery is “honestly somewhat forward-thinking for the early 1930s” (Childress, 2018, para. 17). Anastasia Curwood, director of UK AAS, suggested O’Hanlon “showed a certain subversiveness to put Black people in the front and center of the mural as a clear depiction of who built this society” (Blackford, 2020, para. 10).

Even those who wanted the mural removed recognize the artwork as a historical artifact. Tsage Douglas, chair of the UK Black Student Advisory Council, wrote in an op-ed, “Had this mural been erected in a museum, or a space dedicated to art, rather than a building meant to engage and enrich student life, this conversation would be different” (Douglas, 2019, para. 8). Dakari Parish-Baker, a member of the Black Student Union, agreed, “Nobody is asking you to trash it and remove it and throw it away. Just put it in a museum. That’s what museums are for, to look at history” (Edwards, 2020, para. 14).

5.2. “A false, romanticized rendering”

In 2015, a group of 24 African American students were invited to have a discussion with UK President Capilouto in his home. “The group of students presented a list of 18 recommendations to better the inclusion on UK’s campus. Number 14 was about the mural in Memorial Hall—which they considered racist” (Barnes, 2018, para. 6). Junior Kaelin Massey was among the students who met with Capilouto. According to Massey, ‘That mural is a constant reminder of what Kentucky was before everyone was included” (James, 2016, para. 3). Quiyana Murphy, president of Alpha Kappa Alpha, a historically African American sorority, said that the mural depicted an inaccurate history of slavery, and “now it’s time to take steps to understand this was a bad part of history that should not be glorified” (Barnes, 2018, para. 8–9).

UK Vice President for Institutional Equity Terry Allen said the students at the meeting “did not feel included, they did not feel welcomed” (Barnes, 2018, para. 5). Capilouto later wrote in his blog, “The frustrations they raised have been voiced by so many other members of our community and beyond it: that their University—our University—is willing to sustain a work of art that they find to be a painful and degrading personification of a false, romanticized rendering of our shared history” (Capilouto, 2015a, para 2). In a university-wide email following the meeting, Capilouto announced, “I made the decision to temporarily shroud the mural out of respect for long-term expressions of concern that could no longer go unanswered” (Capilouto, 2015b, para. 2).

Tanquarae McCadney, a UK student who attended the meeting, said she was pleased by the covering and thought the mural needed to be removed. “I think art is open to many interpretations, but with this particular piece, it lets African American students know they don’t have a place besides a tobacco field” (Blackford, 2015b, para 6–7). UK senior Rashad Bigham was also happy with the outcome. “This is a good first step toward creating a place where some people don’t have to be reminded about something as horrible as slavery.” Bigham was also impressed with the access to Capilouto. “African American students were able to sit down eye to eye with the president and have real conversation. He really heard us, and his steps have shown his sincerity” (Blackford, 2015b, para. 8–10).

While students felt heard in Capilouto’s decision to cover the mural, faculty did not. Over 150 faculty wrote an open letter to Capilouto stating, “First, we applaud the two dozen students with whom you met privately and their willingness to express their concerns and experiences at the University of Kentucky. It is not easy for young people to sit across from those in authority and speak truth to power” (Price et al., 2015, para. 2). However, “the absence of Black faculty and staff in this very important conversation is demonstrative of the piece-meal approach that is often taken in matters of this kind…the closed-door nature of the discussions that have yielded the decision to cover the mural betrays the role of the university as a place for open dialogue and education” (para 2–3).

5.3. “It is immovable”

In the university-wide email announcing he would shroud the mural in 2015, Capilouto declared, “We will not destroy or remove or permanently hide the mural, but we will make the story told in the atrium of Memorial Hall more complete” (Capilouto, 2015b, para 3). According to UK Spokesperson Jay Blanton, removing the mural was
never considered an option because the painting “is literally imbedded in a load bearing wall” (Johnson, 2020, para. 15). As a fresco—a technique of mural painting that combines water and dry powder pigment to paint directly onto freshly laid lime plaster—the painting became an integral part of the wall with the setting of the plaster. “The mural has become part of the building and cannot be removed without destroying the artwork itself” said UK Art Museum Director Horodner (Childress, 2018, para. 5).

In response to the open letter from faculty after the mural was covered in 2015, a committee was established by Capilouto to recommend “a long-term step with respect to the mural” (Blanton, 2016, para 3). The committee, which included eight faculty and administrators, one staff member, one community member, and one student, “recommended the mural stay put” (James, 2016, para 4). A documentary on the student protests and the mural controversy pointed out that only one Black student voice was included on the committee that made the decision to keep the mural intact, while faculty and administrators beholden to the university made up the rest of the committee (Fitch, 2019).

During the sit-in that led to the second covering of the mural, a student argued, “the fact that the mural is still in Memorial Hall, it’s an analogy to this university. You all are not fully committed to tearing up those intrinsic things that are in the foundation of this university” (Fitch, 2019, 33:15:33:27). According to Douglas (2019), “Non-Black and Non-Native students, faculty, and staff at this institution are inspired to hate, to be openly racist, and to openly discriminate against us because the mural is sign from the university that they will be supported, protected, and celebrated for doing so” (para. 6).

However, during the sit in, Capilouto was still adamant that the fresco must remain, “I will tell you as a university president, going in and destroying art is difficult. If I could move it, I certainly would” (Fitch, 2019, 30:32:46). When pressed by the students, Capilouto repeated, “I can’t move it. It is immovable. The wall is a supporting wall with the paint that was put on the plaster when it was wet. We looked at any ways to lift it off, move the wall, and so forth. There was not a way to do that” (32:34:33:09).

5.4. “We cannot allow it to stand alone”

While Capilouto argued for the mural to stay, he agreed with the faculty-led committee that additional context and conversation was required. He wrote in his blog, “In spite of the artist’s admirable, finely honed skill that gave life to the mural, we cannot allow it to stand alone” (2015a, 2015b, para. 7). In the fall of 2017, Capilouto established another committee, the Memorial Hall Art Committee, to accept submissions from artists that would “reshape the experience of Memorial Hall and the O’Hanlon mural” (Hale, 2017a, 2017b, para. 6). Art Museum Director Horodner, who co-chaired the committee, recognized that the conversation regarding the mural would continue. “It was on the wall and appreciated and challenged and questioned from the time that it was made until today” (James, 2018, para 6–8). Olivier, who ultimately won the competition, said her companion artwork was not meant to resolve the conflict that surrounds the mural, but rather to put the mural in a new context for future conversation. “The role of art is not to resolve things” Olivier said. “If my piece kind of like neatly packaged it up, then the conversation is done and the piece failed” (Childress, 2018, para 12–13).

Olivier’s installation, Witness, was a gilded tribute “taking the subjugated, folks who were considered lowly or insignificant, the people who were anonymous, who didn’t have names, and then elevating them to the level of divine” (Childress, 2018, para 1–3). Olivier added portraits of important Black and Native American individuals in Kentucky’s history around the outside of the vestibule dome and then replicated the paintings of the subjugated figures in the mural and placed them on gold leaf—as is often seen in cathedrals from the Byzantine and Renaissance periods—inside the dome. Around the base of the dome, she added a Frederick Douglass quote, “There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him” (Hale & Wells, 2018). “What does it mean for people who were subjugated or caricatured to be moved into a sacred space?” Olivier asked. “The subjugated have been lifted to the divine as a rebirth” (Blackford, 2018, para. 14).

Accountancy professor Nicole Thorne Jenkins, who served on the mural art committee, said, “I think it’s a good response. It will invoke [sic] conversation that’s necessary on campus” (Blackford, 2017, para. 16). According to Capilouto, that was the purpose of the installation, to encourage conversation about the history of slavery and the changing ways in which it has been represented in art. However, some students did not believe adding the companion artwork was helpful. During the April 2019 protests, Black Student Advisory Council Chair Douglas told Capilouto and others gathered, “It’s [the mural] not something that the University of Kentucky’s students are willing to put up with anymore” (Ladd, 2019, para 5).

After the mural was covered for a second time, prompting local media to claim, “The fresco has become a plaster strip-tease artist with the number of times it’s been covered, uncovered, then covered again” (Blackford, 2020, para 2), Olivier wrote an open letter to the university, stating

> Our complex histories need to be wrestled with, even when they can’t be resolved. How do we reconcile dissent, multiplicity, simultaneity and paradox, which are imbedded in our country’s history? Erasing (or removal), we know does not erase the historical facts of slavery and oppression. (2019, para 3)

Douglas countered Olivier in her own op-ed, Ms. Olivier created Witness to honor and respect Black and Brown Kentuckians, and yet that work has enraged students on this campus even further. Gold leaf to remind us of the opulence of the Byzantine church. Gold stolen from our native lands...What message do the smiles of those subjugated send? That only in death can we be happy, now ascended to heaven? (2019, para. 9)

Douglas also suggested that Olivier, a Black woman born in Trinidad and Tobago, did not understand what it was like to grow up Black in the U.S. She argued that the mural was not necessary for continuing conversations about race and that adding the companion artwork only added to the trauma felt by Black students at UK.

5.5. “A roadblock to reconciliation”

A year later, citing the haunting images of the police killing of George Floyd, Capilouto announced in a campus-wide email that the mural would be removed from Memorial Hall. “Just as certain images haunt me, I also cannot escape certain conversations that, over years, remain fresh” (Capilouto, 2020a, 2020b, para. 9). In an interview with Spokesperson Blanton regarding the announcement, he confirmed, “It will be removed from the building. What that looks like we don’t know yet” (personal communication). When asked how the impossible suddenly became possible, he said, “What should have been said all along is not that it couldn’t be removed but that removing it is really cost prohibitive; it’s really hard and really expensive.” In Capilouto’s email, he wrote:

> We have discussed the mural for many years and made a number of important, productive efforts to seek common ground and lasting solutions. But the spaces we have created for dialogue, and the work we have commissioned to expand conversation and contextualize art, haven’t worked, frankly. Our efforts and solutions with the mural, for many of our students, have been a roadblock to reconciliation, rather than a path toward healing. (2020a, 2020b, para. 18)

When she learned UK planned to remove the mural, Olivier wrote an op-ed in The Washington Post stating, “my work was not created to
magically dispel or absolve the University of Kentucky from embedded institutional white supremacy or oppression... The day I completed my response to the mural was the day the university’s real work needed to begin” (Olivier, 2020, A17). According to Olivier, “The University’s decision to remove the O’Hanlon mural also renders my work Witness blind and mute” (Childress & Eads, 2020, para 4). “It can’t work without the past it seeks to confront” (Edwards, 2020, para. 9). The National Coalition Against Censorship wrote an open letter to UK, pleading with them not to remove the mural. “This is the first instance we are aware of in which the removal of a mural by a white artist will have the simultaneous effect of silencing the work of a Black artist” (Finan, 2020, para 2).

Blanton said Capilouto would be the first to admit they probably did not do enough to promote Olivier’s companion artwork and keep the conversation going. He also was quick to point out that “every year it’s a new set of students and they don’t know that you had this competition and this commission of art and this contextualization of the pieces, and maybe in some ways they don’t care” (personal communication). He said that a major challenge was that they “were constantly relitigating this issue” and the mural continued to be a hurdle when they tried to have larger conversations about policy and improvements across campus. He suggested that removing the mural would create a context to further dialogue as well as space for healing” (Blanton, 2020, para. 2). Olivier disagreed, “Removing the mural chooses silence, erasure and avoidance over engagement, investigation and real reconciliation” (2020, A17).

5.6. “The mural is the least of my worries”

Throughout the mural controversy, while only minimally covered in the media, there continued to be an underlying narrative that the university and its students were focusing on the wrong things. Two open letters by faculty laid out concrete steps the university can take to “have an immediate impact on racial equity” (AAAS, 2020, para. 6; Price et al., 2015), including requiring a course on race and inequality, increasing Black representation among faculty and leadership, increasing support for Black students, and establishing a system of accountability for individuals who commit racist and other acts of discrimination on campus. While the group of students who met with Capilouto in 2015 told him that the mural mirrored other problems with the campus’ racial climate (Blackford, 2018), UK Junior Kaelin Massey stated, “Honestly, for me personally, the mural is the least of my worries” (James, 2015, para. 9).

A number of racially-charge incidents have occurred over the years on the UK campus, “including hate speech directed at protesters and an effigy of President Obama found hanging outside a university building in 2008” (James, 2016, para. 5). The day after the mural was covered for the second time in April 2019, someone hung a sign on the covered mural that read, “Keep the Mural!” The following week a student, dressed in black face posted on social media, “F*** N***ers,” “N***ers should die” (Douglas, 2019, para. 6). Curwood and journalism sophomore and Movement for Black Lives leader Mariah Kendall wrote in an op-ed that University administrators “were not addressing the real issues. “Mariah has attended predominantly white institutions all her life but has found that the hostility of white peers saying the N-word and the awkwardness of being asked for the ‘black opinion’ in class discussions still exist at the University” (Kendall & Curwood, 2020, para. 2). Students are also unlikely to see Black professors at the front of their classrooms and those “Black professors who are at UK are less likely to be at the most senior faculty levels; only 1.8 percent of those at the rank of full Professor are Black” (para. 2).

Responding to the national outcry over police violence in June 2020, Capilouto emailed a campus-wide message, offering comforting words. “How do we do better than we are doing today?” he asked. Two days later, he pledged to remove the Memorial Hall mural and two weeks after that, he announced an action plan to the Board of Trustees and the campus community. The plan represented a new beginning, “one from which we will not retreat ever again” (Capilouto, 2020b, para. 66). However, according to Kendall and Curwood, “none of what the president has outlined does enough to fight institutional racism at UK” (2020a, 2020b, para. 4).

Curwood was serving on the mural committee both times the mural was covered. The committee was neither consulted nor informed before Capilouto made the announcement university wide. In an interview to discuss case context, Curwood said that by time Capilouto announced he was removing the mural (again without consulting the committee), they were just tired. “We’re dealing with this silly mural while we have students being harassed and dealing with racism on campus all the time” (personal communication). “I just thought it had been a waste of my time.”

Curwood acknowledged that students have been pushing for removing the mural for a long time. She said, “I cannot speak for those students, but those students cannot speak for me and they do not speak for everyone” (personal communication). When discussing what it will cost to move the mural as well Olivier’s companion artwork, Curwood lamented, “You know how many scholarships we could give students, the folks we could hire, the recruitment and retention efforts we could fund with the money we will spend to take down the mural!” According to Kendall and Curwood (2020), “Given its actions so far, we must conclude that the University is more committed to symbolic rather than real action” (para. 9).

6. Discussion

As Liu and Pomper (2012) noted in their conceptualization of crises involving issues of culture, ethnicity, and/or race, these crises “may constitute the most painful and volatile threats faced by organizations and individuals. Each is distinctive and must be handled with emotional intelligence” (p. 142). This study analyzed a “painful” and “volatile” crisis situation that a university faced when an historical artwork considered to be a racially progressive piece when it was created has been deemed racist at worst, culturally insensitive at best. The university attempted to provide context to the artwork, by explaining its creation and history as well as by creating companion artwork to lessen its offensiveness, but none of those attempts assuaged the critics. Researchers suggest that U.S. colleges’ and universities’ legitimacy requires that they meet or exceed stakeholder expectations and increase social impact by seeking constructive societal change, including on matters of race (Heath & Waymer, 2021).

In a nation where racial divisiveness has existed for centuries, universities must be vigilant by identifying and planning for crises that might emerge due to misunderstandings and conflicts about matters of race (Liu & Pomper, 2012). Vigilant anticipation requires more than just polishing a well-crafted speech designed to minimize damage immediately following a crisis event (Heath, 2004b), and in many instances, such a strategy would be ineffective when a crisis has a dialectical tension at its core.

In the UK Memorial Mural case, administrators, faculty, staff, students and community members wrestled with competing narratives and dialectical tensions. The mural is an historic piece of art. However, some individuals said they felt traumatized by the depictions of slavery while others were affronted by the mural’s false, romanticized rendering because it did not depict the horrific cruelty of slavery. No one is petitioning to remove the other PWAP murals on campus that are devoid of Black bodies.

When UK commissioned the companion artwork so the mural would not stand alone, they knew it would not end the controversy. In fact, the stated purpose was to invite difficult conversations about race to occur on campus. Each time discussions of race came up, so did the mural and the University’s unwillingness to remove what had become a symbol of systemic racism. In effect, leaving the mural up to continue the conversation was considered by some as a way to continue to stifle Black voices. When Capilouto made the decision to remove what he acknowledged was a roadblock in moving discussions of race forward,
he was faced with having to also remove the work of a Black artist. After years of trying to maintain the tensions of protecting historical art and protecting students from trauma, UK made the symbolic gesture of tearing down its foundation of racism, only to be charged with muting the voice of a Black artist.

Race is a serious matter and matters of race must be taken seriously by public relations and crisis communication practitioners and scholars. Waymer and Heath (2007) asserted that being reflective, inclusive, and proactive can enhance an organization’s crisis response. Being vigilant about matters of race, which includes making race and other aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion key components of organizations and/or changing antiquated organizational cultures, is one way to enhance an organization’s crisis planning, management, and response.

As UK Spokesperson Blanton noted, there is complete turnover on a college campus about every four years, whereby new students are not privy to all of the training and diversity talks that have occurred across campus. What they are exposed to, however, are the narratives passed down about the mural and its effects on Black faculty, staff, and students. According to Curwood, “It had almost become this urban legend. Most students don’t even know where the mural is located on campus, but they definitely know it’s here somewhere” (personal communication). As evidenced in our analysis, students on campus engaged in activism calling for the erasure of the artwork and at times the “canceling” of persons who opposed their position. Chair of the Black Student Council Douglas, seemingly attempted to “cancel” artist Olivier by claiming that as a Black person born in a predominantly Black country, Olivier could not understand what it is like to grow up Black in the U.S.

Cancel culture in crisis communication, however, is antithetical to effective crisis management as Sellnow (2015) asserts that the true nature of a crisis is revealed through hearing and analyzing multiple and competing voices. While paradoxical, erasure proves to be a useful conceptual framing to analyze and unpack a crisis of dialectical tensions in the age of cancel culture. Emerging from our analysis, some persons believed that the removal of the mural was not as important as addressing more pressing blatant and overt acts of racism and systemic injustices. This finding is consistent with research which finds that acts of erasure often divert attention from broader underlying issues whereby they become “relativized, decontextualized and therefore depoliticized, distracting attention from the actual and specific structural inequalities in society” (Bouvier, 2020, p. 2).

This study provides support for the argument that scholars of crisis communication must make room for dialectic tensions in crisis narratives. The prevailing notion in the scholarship is that crisis managers should match strategic crisis responses to the level of crisis responsibility and reputational threat posed by a crisis; however, such a formulaic approach to crisis management diminishes at best and overlooks at worst the nuance and complexity that are at the center of crises emerging from issues of culture, ethnicity, and race.

Liu and Pompper (2012) argued that crises involving issues of culture, ethnicity, and/or race must be about more than mitigating reputational damage and must include both an effort to build “genuine, long-term relationships with communities and media of various ethnicities and cultures” (p. 141) and managerial competence in developing and displaying emotional intelligence, that is “respecting and validating audiences’ feelings and concerns” (p. 142). This study extends the research of Liu and Pompper by arguing that one way to demonstrate emotional intelligence and build genuine, long-term relationships with marginalized communities is to make room for and embrace the dialectical tensions that emerge in crises.

The more substantive theoretical contribution of this study emerges from our further examination of the paradoxical nature of erasure. From our understanding of the erasure paradox as postulated by Waymer and Heath (2019), erasure has been used as a strategic tool, communicatively, by influential organizations to maintain or enhance reputation or to exert power over another group. Waymer and Heath identified erasure by repurposing in their study of the Roman Catholic Church’s erasure and re-writing of ancient Roman artifacts, as well as erasure by mutilation in their study of Mussolini’s construction of a road over ancient Roman ruins to connect the Colosseum to Mussolini’s balcony. Of course, there are examples where repurposing can also be used to bolster image, and mutilation can be used by a powerful organization to establish dominance. While not explicitly stated, the authors also discussed erasure as reputation management (TV networks and Hollywood Walk of Fame dissociating themselves from iconic celebrity Bill Cosby) and erasure as issues management (International Olympic Committee stripping athletes of their Olympic medals).

All of these examples of erasure center on relatively influential organizations making the decision to erase something from public memory. Where this study differs, however, is that it demonstrates an instance in public relations where marginalized publics are the ones initiating the calls for erasure, and they are using erasure both as public relations empowerment and as activism to (re)take power. Erasure as public relations empowerment occurs when groups gain a sense of identity and pride in removing oppressive symbols, while erasure as activism to (re) take power occurs when groups form and rally to exert power over institutions that promote oppressive ideologies. We then find that both the university (a more powerful organization based on traditional notions of influence and power) and the marginalized publics came together to call for erasure as reconciliation, whereby the erasure was used to construct a narrative of unity and healing. Thus, we have added to and codified a typology of erasure in public relations.

7. Erasure in public relations typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Erasure Strategy</th>
<th>Explanation of the Erasure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Erasure by Mutilation</td>
<td>Capitoline Hill (The Capitolium), regarded as the most sacred of Rome’s seven hills, was mutilated to erect the Altar della Patria (Altar of the Fatherland) also known as the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument, to honor of the first king of a unified Italy not of the Roman Empire. The Roman Catholic Church repurposed the Colosseum and the Pantheon (a former Roman temple to the gods) to encourage pilgrimage to a site of early Christian persecution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erasure by Repurposing</td>
<td>TV networks and Hollywood Walk of Fame, to preserve reputation, dissociated themselves from Bill Cosby following his public trial and conviction of sexual assault.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erasure as Reputation Management</td>
<td>International Olympic Committee, to maintain legitimacy as a regulatory body, stripped athletes of their Olympic medals if found guilty of violating policy and/or cheating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasure as Issues Management</td>
<td>Groups formed and rallied to force the covering of a mural at the University of Kentucky and tear down Confederate monuments at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, believing those artworks and monuments support slavery and promote racist ideologies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erasure as Empowerment</td>
<td>Groups gain a sense of identity and pride in removing oppressive symbols including artwork depicting slavery and statues of Christopher Columbus, Junipero Serra, and Juan de Oñate in the U.S. and memorials to figures native in the U.S. and memorials to figures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erasure as Reconciliation</td>
<td>The UK Memorial Hall mural case shows that both the university and activists eventually called for removal of the mural to foster reconciliation and healing.</td>
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8. Critical analysis and practical recommendations

UK did attempt to make room for dialectic tensions as its narrative evolved from the mural being a “statement of history” that is “immovable” to “a roadblock to reconciliation” that must come down. However, the university was not effective in bringing together the voices with
comparing narratives. Capilouto invited two dozen students to his home after which he decided to cover the mural for the first time. Faculty had to write an open letter to ask Capilouto to consider their voices in the mural decision-making. An “inclusive” committee was formed, but only one student had a seat at that table compared to ten faculty and staff.

While we agree with Waymer and Heath’s (2007) assertion that being reflective, inclusive, and proactive can enhance an organization’s crisis response, after critical analysis, we offer four recommendations specifically for crisis managers on university campuses dealing with crises that have competing interpretations of highly charged, socio-political issues, such as those stemming from racial injustice, at their center. First, universities must accept their role in constructing societal change. We cannot avoid conversations about race on campus because it is too hard or might offend someone. The University of Kentucky ignored complaints about the mural for decades before President Capilouto finally agreed to meet with students.

Second, universities must engage in vigilant anticipation (Heath, 2004b), which means they must be listening to their publics and sitting in the rooms where difficult conversations are being had. Those most vocal about wanting the Memorial Hall mural removed were not on the committee established to address the complaints about the mural. And, ultimately, those who were on the committee were not involved in the decision to remove the mural.

Third, universities must engage in, teach, and encourage thoughtful, respectful discourse that does not allow for the automatic “canceling” of dissenting voices. If we cannot have civil discourse on a university campus, we are failing our students and society. Requiring courses in critical reading, social justice, and media literacy could go a long way toward fostering civil discourse on university campuses.

Finally, universities wrestling with issues of race on campus must ensure they are not placing the burden of fighting for social justice on the backs of those who are facing injustice. Diversity committees cannot continue to be staffed only with Black and Brown people while leaving the backs of those who are facing injustice. Diversity committees cannot for other perspectives? These questions and others unasked suggest that staffing a committee with one student or one person of color is not in ensuring they are not placing the burden of fighting for social justice on university campuses.

For example, in a dialectical battle, does it toward fostering civil discourse on university campuses.

Our analysis is limited to a single case study, and thus, our findings are not generalizable to other crisis events. What this case did provide was a distinct example of marginalized publics initiating calls for erasure and as reconciliation. Including dialectical tensions conceptually in our analysis allowed us to better understand and tease out the paradoxical nature of erasure.

Future research should further unpack the paradoxical nature of erasure to determine other applications and to advance applied theory development in public relations. Research is also needed to better understand how leaders can develop emotional intelligence by grappling with dialectical tensions. For example, in a dialectical battle, does it matter which enactor (side) calls for the erasure? Do less powerful voices also need to demonstrate emotional intelligence or does their less powerful status allow them to call for erasure without any consideration for other perspectives? These questions and others unasked suggest that scholars in future research should continue to problematize erasure in public relations and crisis management as this area is ripe for further exploration. Finally, research is needed to further examine issues of culture, ethnicity, and race in university settings. The recent events at Duke University, North Carolina-Chapel Hill (see Anderson, 2018) and now the University of Kentucky indicate the racial reckoning on college campuses is far from over.

Declaration of Competing Interest

One of the authors was employed by the University of Kentucky during the preliminary research of the case, which allowed the author access to university emails regarding the mural and physical access to view the mural and companion artwork. The author was not involved in either of the mural committees and was not involved in the university’s decision-making making process regarding the mural.

References


