



8-2022

## University Statements on the Murder of George Floyd: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Alexandria M. Brown

*University of Tennessee, Knoxville, abenson9@utk.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes)



Part of the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brown, Alexandria M., "University Statements on the Murder of George Floyd: A Critical Discourse Analysis. " Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2022.  
[https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes/6476](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/6476)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Alexandria M. Brown entitled "University Statements on the Murder of George Floyd: A Critical Discourse Analysis." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Sociology.

Lois Presser, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Michelle Christian, Dorian McCoy

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**UNIVERSITY STATEMENTS ON THE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD: A CRITICAL  
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Alexandria Brown  
August 2022

Copyright © 2022 by Alexandria M. Brown  
All rights reserved.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thank you to my husband, Cody, for taking care of our family during this difficult season. To my son, Felix, this is all for you, little boy. To my committee, Drs. Lois Presser, Michelle Christian, and Dorian McCoy, thank you for putting up with me, I appreciate all you did to help and encourage me. To my amazing cohorts, I love and adore you and your support has been invaluable. And to my besties, I promise I will (probably) never put you through this again.

## **ABSTRACT**

Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, murdered George Floyd on May 25, 2020. After this killing, many universities throughout the United States, including all the institutions in the Southeastern Conference (SEC), released public statements about the murder. Over the last few decades, cuts in funding to institutions of higher education have resulted in colleges and universities adopting the managerial and revenue-generating practices of corporations. With corporations as their example, they have also taken to releasing statements about socio-political events, rather than just about incidents pertaining to their immediate stakeholders. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, this paper examines those statements and discusses the discursive practices employed by the SEC university chancellors and presidents.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION .....               | 1  |
| Purpose of the Study .....                   | 1  |
| Significance of the Study .....              | 3  |
| CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW .....          | 5  |
| The University and Academic Capitalism ..... | 6  |
| University Leadership .....                  | 10 |
| Social Responsibility and Corporations ..... | 12 |
| University Crisis and Communication .....    | 15 |
| The Southeastern Conference .....            | 18 |
| CHAPTER THREE MATERIALS AND METHODS .....    | 21 |
| Corpus .....                                 | 22 |
| Data Collection and Analysis .....           | 23 |
| Trustworthiness of Researcher .....          | 24 |
| CHAPTER FOUR ANALYSIS .....                  | 26 |
| Representation of Social Actors .....        | 26 |
| Metaphor of Family .....                     | 27 |
| Pronoun “We” .....                           | 31 |
| Use of Modals and Abstraction .....          | 33 |
| Exclusion .....                              | 37 |
| Backgrounding .....                          | 38 |
| Suppression .....                            | 41 |
| Corpus Delicti .....                         | 43 |
| CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS .....               | 49 |
| REFERENCES .....                             | 55 |
| APPENDICES .....                             | 67 |
| VITA .....                                   | 74 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Image of Bob Caslen's Message..... | 72 |
|--|----|



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by an officer of the Minneapolis Police Department while being detained for suspicion of using counterfeit money. While Derek Chauvin was later found guilty of his murder, three other police officers were complicit. His death followed the killings of two other African Americans, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, in Kentucky and Georgia, respectively. The injustice of his murder, led to protests all over the United States and throughout the world. Following George Floyd's murder, many corporations chose to issue public responses regarding racial injustice and discrimination. Additionally, colleges and universities<sup>1</sup> throughout the United States moved to release their own topical press statements. While public statements from institutions of higher education are ordinarily released in regard to racial and other violence on their own campuses, the widespread response to an event outside of their immediate purview indicates a new approach by colleges and universities (Davis and Harris 2016, Garcia et al., Martin and Stee 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Statements by presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities have typically been limited to communications that pertain to their immediate stakeholders (Nelson 2013). Police

---

<sup>1</sup> In the United States, the terms “college” and “university” are often used interchangeably for institutions of higher education. Both offer undergraduate degrees; however, universities are distinct in that they offer graduate programs, are typically larger in size and student population, and have a commitment to research production (Undergraduate Programs 2020).

murder of African American men is pervasive in the United States, but elites<sup>2</sup> and leaders of elite institutions rarely make public statements about those murders and certainly not the leaders of institutions of higher education (Schwartz 2020). Institutions of higher education were constructed, led, and attended by white elites for centuries (Wilder 2013). Though universities are often demonized as liberal bastions, “students are mainly exposed to ideas, concepts, values and attitudes much more designed to foster acceptance of the ‘conventional wisdom’ than acute dissent from it” (Miliband 1969:258). If these leaders of institutions of higher education, who normally abstain from commenting on sociopolitical issues, especially ones that are considered divisive because of their connection with racism and police, it is crucial to examine how these statements function. Elites, (e.g. college and university presidents) create discourse to establish and maintain their own status in society, and George Floyd is not a member of that group (Fairclough 1989). It seems that elites who choose to write about George Floyd do so because it benefits them and helps to preserve their dominance or/and because they understand that not writing about him will somehow harm them and cause insecurity to their position.

---

<sup>2</sup> Elites are “white politicians, philosophers, historians, social scientists, psychologists, journalists, writers, the military, the clergy, managers” who have a role “in the enactment, legitimation, and reproduction of racism” and in regard to discourse have “preferential access to and control over public discourse” and “control the means of communication and who are engaged in the manufacturing of public opinion” (van Dijk 1993: ix-x). At United States colleges and universities, elites would include their presidents and chancellors.

## Significance of the Study

This study is important because institutions of higher education in the United States, historically and contemporarily, are sites of exclusion and white supremacy (Cabrera 2014). The white people who have accessed them and who operate these institutions have typically been elite members of society. White elites, more than any other group, have “special access to, and control over the means of public discourse and communication, [and] as a result, the knowledge, attitudes, norms, values and ideologies of recipients are—more or less indirectly—affected in the interest of the dominant group” (van Dijk 1995:85). Presidents and chancellors of large public institutions of higher education, like the ones that are included in this research, influence tens of thousands of people; faculty, staff, students, and even community members, who are stakeholders of those institutions. The statements released by SEC presidents and chancellors may not reach as many people as the CEO of a national or multi-national corporation, but the leaders of these institutions have influence over thousands and even tens of thousands of students, faculty, and staff. Though it has been rationalized that the demands on the university president’s time are too great for them to speak out on broader socio-political issues, there are “many who deplore [their] relative silence [and] some even suspect the influence of other consideration, such as the fear of alienating donors or triggering political retaliation” (Duderstadt 2007:226). While research has investigated statements made by university presidents about racialized violence on their own campus and statements about some controversial sociopolitical event, (Andrade and Lundberg 2020, Davis and Harris 2016, Garcia et al., Hypolite and Stewart 2021, Martin and Stee 2020), I could not find research about statements made by university leaders about police brutality and murder that was not directly connected with their own institutional constituents. If elite members of society, like

college and university presidents, are responding to a topic that is considered controversial, it is important to investigate their statements.

In the thesis I explored the statements released by the presidents and chancellors of Southern Conference universities. These university leaders used their statements to unify their stakeholders under the metaphor of “family” and to define the specific values of those who were classified under that term. Though the power dynamics between these presidents and chancellors were vastly different than the faculty, staff, and students at their institutions, they positioned themselves as one of the “family,” seemingly abdicating their responsibility in providing tangible guidance, exacting real change, and bringing their plans to fruition. Though they defined George Floyd’s murder as a “tragedy,” the majority of the presidents and chancellors chose not to name the police as his murderer, and some even omitted George Floyd’s name in their statements. What follows is a discussion of these discursive strategies and the motivation for their employment.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research is situated within the scholarly literature on the historical and contemporary role of colleges and universities in the United States under racialized capitalism as well as literature on race and racism. More specifically, how scholars have identified the increased pattern of universities mimicking the practices of corporations, creating “academic capitalism.” Those practices include how the university is managed and how the purpose of the university is geared towards revenue generating activities. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, colleges and universities in the United States received significant funding from the federal government but that financial support has declined over the last few decades (Heller 2016). College and universities have become more dependent on other sources of funding like student tuitions and fees, donor gifts, and faculty research grants. With a variety of funding sources also comes a variety of constituents with varying views and values. When confronted by controversial sociopolitical issues on campus and beyond, university leaders adopt “crisis management” and “social responsibility” discourses that corporations utilize, to maintain good relationships with their constituents and to prevent potential financial insecurity. In this chapter, I provide a brief history of the proliferation of higher education in the United States and the circumstances that fostered academic capitalism. Second, I describe the role and responsibilities of the executive leaders of universities and how those tasks are related to academic capitalism. Next, I discuss the rise of corporations under capitalism and the emergence and evolution of corporate social responsibility. Last, I illustrate how the practices of corporate social responsibility as well as crisis communication have been adopted by colleges and

universities as a method for appealing to and maintaining good relationships with their numerous stakeholders.

### **The University and Academic Capitalism**

In the United States, upper-class white men founded and financially supported the earliest universities, and that subset comprised the bulk of those institutions' cohorts (Byrd et al. 2019, Evans 2016). The number of colleges in the United States increased as the country expanded and the population grew, but institutions of higher education proliferated at such an exponential rate that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century American colleges "found themselves precariously short of students" (Engell and Dangerfield 2005:57). In order to continue operating, it became necessary for these institutions to convince the American public that a college education was a prerequisite to becoming a part of the emerging managerial class (Barrow 1990, Engell and Dangerfield 2005). The university needed to be seen as a place to acquire the skills and qualification necessary to gain future employment (Miliband 1969). This scheme by educational leaders of colleges and universities throughout the country was exceedingly successful and college enrollment increased rapidly in the decades to follow.

In the United States, at least seventy percent of young people will take some number of higher education courses, with colleges and universities having an instrumental role in the "production, coordination, retention, and dissemination of knowledge" (Gross 2013:24). Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, students have been encouraged to view higher education and "the college experience as a literal investment designed to repay them in the form of higher life-time earnings" (Engell and Dangerfield 2005:63). For the student, the role of the university is to offer them the requisite skills and education they need for employment in the labor market. The primary mission

of higher education has become to, “foster economic growth in the nation, to assist the citizenry in securing lucrative employment, and to serve practical purposes” (Engell and Dangerfield 2005:5).

Since higher education was perceived as a benefit to citizens and the nation; state and federal financial support to U.S. higher education increased in the years following the end of World War II. The cash influx led to a “massive expansion of university enrollments, infrastructure, and research” (Heller 2016:16). However, in the 1970s, funding for higher education declined after decades of government investment linked to research and development for the country’s Cold War efforts (Heller 2016). Though university presidents had always been involved in securing funding sources for their institutions, it became even more vital for them to acquire the financial support of private donors, including wealthy corporations, foundation, and former alumni (Nelson 2013:19). No matter the period in the United States, money is an essential factor in operating institutions of higher education (Kirp 2003).

While Edward Hackett coined the term “academic capitalism” in 1990, the concept is more often attributed to Sheila Slaughter and her various coauthors. Slaughter and Larry Leslie released their book *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University* in 1997 and Slaughter and Gary Rhoades’ book, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, States and Higher Education* was released in 2004 (Hackett 2014, Slaughter and Leslie 2001). Academic capitalism “deals with market and market-like behaviors on the part of universities and faculty” (Slaughter and Leslie 2001:154). The term encompasses a variety of activities carried out by university administrators and faculty, including competing for funding from corporations and government entities, selling licensed sports paraphernalia, reducing or closing academic units to

replace them with other disciplines that are perceived as being more profitable, replacing “expensive” tenure and tenure-line faculty with part-time faculty and any other revenue-generating behaviors (Hanley 2005, Slaughter and Leslie 2001). Since students pay tuition and fees, the recruitment of students is also a facet of revenue-generation. “As a percentage of public college revenues, for example, revenue from tuition increased from 23 percent in 1987 to 47 percent in 2012” (Heller 2016:176). Academic capitalism transforms students into consumers with buying power and U.S. colleges and universities are in competition for their tuition dollars (Hanley 2005, Slaughter and Leslie 2001).

Universities, as an ideal, are meant to facilitate “the processes of democratic education, critical thinking, self-examination and debate” and ensure “that citizens will have the skills necessary to govern themselves [and] to participate in making their world a better one” (Johnson et al. 2003: 9-10). Many U.S. colleges and universities make explicit references in their mission statements regarding their desire to positively influence society and humanity and to create knowledge that benefits the wider world and prepare their students to contribute as citizens (Furco 2010). However, rather than focusing on the “traditional education values of enlightenment and individual growth,” higher education has become a center for “vocational training and corporate research” (Schrecker 2010:4). Presidents, boards of trustees and other university administrators have responded to funding shortfalls by “moving away from their ostensible mission of serving the public good to that of becoming as far as possible like private enterprises” (Heller 2016:2). Universities and faculty members engage in “market-like behaviors” by seeking revenue through “external grants and contracts, endowment funds, university-industry partnerships, [and]



intuitional investment in professors' spin-off companies" (Slaughter and Leslie 2001:154). These "revenue-generating activit(ies)" are one of the key components of academic capitalism.

While faculty members provide one source of revenue through external research funding, "increasingly, the burden for supporting state universities and colleges throughout the nation has been switched to tuition and the responsibility for funding higher education shifted to students and their parents" (Lawrence 2006:7). Colleges and universities create enrollment management offices whose sole purpose is to "sell higher education as product and service to students and parents, who were conceived as clients and customers" (Slaughter and Leslie 2001:157). The population in the United States is shifting, and between 2050 and 2075, white people will be the minority. "Sooner than that, by 2050, more than half of the traditional college-age cohort of eighteen and twenty-five-year-olds will be comprised of groups now considered minorities" (Lawrence 2006:5). Besides the change in the racial demographics of the U.S., birth rates have also declined (Grawe 2018). The combination of declining birth rates and fewer white people in the country means that colleges are looking to other groups to make up for the potential loss of enrollment.

While the "enrollment cliff" or "enrollment bust" is not projected for a few more years, colleges and universities have been working to shift their recruitment efforts for years, recognizing that the demographics among the school-age population is shifting and "in a not-too-distant future, the majority of college students will be non-white" (Ndemanu 2017:243). Many colleges and universities have been shifting their recruitment efforts towards minority and lower-income students, who are seen as some of the primary groups to keep enrollment from declining at these institutions. These groups, which were excluded from higher education in the United States for

centuries, are now being viewed as an untapped market through which colleges and universities can secure their financial future (Byrd et al. 2019, Grawe 2021, Lawrence 2006).

Traditional college students have been classified as young people age eighteen to twenty-five, and historically the bulk of those students have been white, middle and upper middle class. “By 2050, [People of Color] will constitute more than half of the traditional college-age cohort” (Lawrence 2006:5). The changing demographics of the United States means that institutions are looking to offset the loss of their traditional “customer base” with more students of color. However, the governing boards of these institutions, who are “the final authorities setting college and university policies still tend to be white men” (Stripling 2021). With this in mind, it is important to discuss who is responsible for leading a college or university and the essential functions of that position.

### **University Leadership**

Traditionally, most colleges and universities in the United States have been organized using a pyramid structure, with presidents at the top, vice presidents or deans reporting to that president, and various subordinates below them (Alfred and Rosevear 2000). In the case that a campus is part of a larger university system, there is a chief executive officer who is the president and the chancellor is the highest executive on a specific campus. (Duderstadt 2007). University presidents have the job of “academic executives” of their institutions, a position which is managerial in nature rather than scholarly (Nelson 2013:18). The president of the university is the chief executive officer and must “grapple with the diverse array of political and social issues and interests of concern to the many stakeholders of higher education— students and parents, state and federal government, business and labor, the press and the public at large, and, of course, the faculty”

(Duderstadt 2003:99). The hiring process for this position is much more political than other campus positions since university presidents are often chosen by governing bodies; specifically, boards of trustees, rather than the academic leaders or faculty members of the institution they will manage (Cole and Harper 2017, Stripling 2021).

Though they are public entities, the size and scope of universities have caused them to more closely resemble private corporations with a “corporate chain-of-command and division of labor” (Heller 2016). University presidents and boards of trustees are securely positioned at the top of this hierarchy. Prior to the mid-19th century, members of the clergy and lawyers ran the governing boards of most colleges and universities (Barrow 1990, Heller 2016). However, the Industrial Revolution spurred a trend toward businessmen as board members of institutions of higher education. They have used that position to move the universities toward fulfilling the “industrial needs for manpower training and basic research to support industrial development” (Barrow 1990:45). This change further solidified the alliance between university and economy.

Universities presidents are delegated the responsibility of the day-to-day administration of their universities by the governing boards who hired them (Duderstadt 2000, Stearns 2016). One of the job requirements of a university presidents is to create a vision for their institution, including a strategic plan for the campus academic enterprise (Duderstadt 2000, Stearns 2016). This part of their role is often delegated to others for implementation; however, because of the increased expectation of the president to be the public face of the university. Presidents are increasingly required to engage in significant fundraising, convincing private donors, and state and federal legislatures to provide necessary financial support. Presidents supervise their administrators and even have responsibilities to recruit new senior-level administrators to their universities

(Duderstadt 2007). Additionally, presidents are in charge of responding to campus crises. They are “ground zero in any university crisis. Whether the university faces a student protest, an athletic scandal, a financial misstep, or a political attack” (Duderstadt 2007:109). Crises are an inevitable and often time-consuming component of the university president’s career (Duderstadt 2007, Gigliotti 2019, Stearns 2016).

The inevitability of crises means that universities and their presidents are consistently strategizing about ways to minimize potential problems and to foster goodwill and support among their constituents, following the pattern of corporations and so-called social responsibility (Ruben et al 2021). Corporate stakeholders have increasingly expected corporations not just to provide a service and amass wealth for the executives and company investors, but to move away from the destructive and exploitative practices that have often been seen as hallmark of corporate capitalism (Jablonkai 2013, Maak et al. 2021).

### **Social Responsibility and Corporations**

Capitalism emerged as a leading economic system in the sixteenth century and is the primary economic model practiced in the world today. In the latter part of the same century, the corporation first emerged in England and “over the last 150 years...has risen from relative obscurity to come the world’s dominant economic institution” (Bakan 2004:5). The capitalist structure relies on the “unrestrained accumulation of wealth” and is unencumbered by moral code and relies on exploitation (Smedley 2007:48). Advanced capitalism, the current economic framework of the United States and many other industrialized countries, “is all but synonymous with giant enterprise,” and in large corporations dominate the economic landscape (Miliband 1969:12). The popularity and success of corporations as a business model is due to their ability to

“combine the capital, and thus the economic power, of unlimited numbers of people” (Bakan 2004:8). As corporations grew in size in the early twentieth century, so too did people’s fear regarding the amount of power they wielded in society. Americans began to see corporations as soulless and amoral entities that “threatened to overwhelm their social institutions and governments” (Bakan 2004:17).

To restore the faith of the public and preserve their legitimacy in society, corporate leaders began to embrace the strategy of corporate social responsibility (Bakan 2004). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as the voluntary practices (not mandated by law) adopted by corporations to be an ethical and philanthropic citizen for stakeholders while meeting the financial expectations of business (Maak et al 2021). Corporations have both internal (employees) and external (consumers, local communities, investors) stakeholders (Jablonkai 2013). Corporations, while striving for profit, also have obligations to their employees and community, and not just their shareholders. When a corporation increases communication about their CSR activities it also increases the positive image consumers have of that company (Jablonkai 2013). Customers are more likely to have a positive image of a corporation or a product when the company is seen as being supportive of a cause that is important to the consumer themselves (Elving 2013). A positive reputation of a corporation among its stakeholders is a crucial asset that “enables firms to charge premium, enhance their access to capital markets, and attract better applicants and investors” (Elving 2013:57). These outcomes are essential since, in the capitalist context, the corporation is meant to generate profits (Logan 2021).

At the beginning of the 20th century, early practices of corporation social responsibility pertained only to improving conditions of employees and to lessening negative environmental

impact of their business practices (Eichar 2015). In the era of a global COVID-19 pandemic and after the murder of George Floyd, stakeholders have pushed companies to expand what falls under the purview of corporate social responsibility (Zheng 2020). The pressure from stakeholders for corporations to create CSR practices that address racial injustice is linked to the reality that “most companies play a role in creating and maintain inequities through their supply chains, hiring strategies, and the customers bases they serve – or don’t serve” (Zheng 2020).

When a crisis happens, companies face the possibility for fracture in their relationship with their stakeholders (Diers-Lawson 2019). Loyal and supportive stakeholders are essential for the financial security of a corporation. For that reason, it is important to release timely responses to the stakeholders acknowledging that the corporation is aware of the issue, that it is working to protect the stakeholders, and explaining their plans to prevent further crises (Tachokova and Coombs 2022). In the past, many corporations felt that it was prudent to avoid “the controversies associated with social justice claiming that talking about such issues [were] not part of their responsibility as a business” (Coombs 2020). However, companies that wish to maintain a good relationship with their stakeholders are expected to change and adapt to the demand of those stakeholders. In the current era, that means that corporations are expected to address not only the crisis within their own companies but problems of a sociopolitical nature (Tachokova and Coombs 2022). Stakeholders care not just about a company’s “product, services policies, [and] customer service,” but its “performance relative to issues and topics that also matter to the stakeholders” (Diers-Lawson 2019:46). That was certainly true in the case of the murder of George Floyd. Stakeholders expected companies to respond, and quickly, to the issues of racism and police brutality. When companies did not release statements or their response time lagged, stakeholders

questioned the commitment of those organizations to stand against racism. Companies that did not meet the expectations of their constituents “experienced backlash from the public, which ultimately caused serious reputational damage” (Tachokova and Coombs 2022:16).

### ***University Crisis and Communication***

The “office of the president carries the weight and prominence” to make “public utterances on the major social issues of the day in and outside of the gates of campus” (Nelson 2013:76). University presidents, though offered the opportunity to speak out on a plethora of issues, have often chosen to take middle positions, a temperate stance that means they have regularly been silent about wider global, political, social and cultural issues (Nelson 2013). The voice of the president is expected on internal matters and on those external matters that may threaten the financial aid of students, support of research, or academic freedom that are paramount to the success of any university (Nelson 2013). For issues beyond the university, a president is much more likely to proceed with caution, especially when the various stakeholders of the institution have differing views on a subject and addressing it has potential negative consequences (Duderstadt 2000, Duderstadt 2007, Nelson 2013). The president is often considered not just a representative of the university but the university to the wider world (Nelson 2013). The board of trustees sets “the tone for the culture of a college or university and...the expectations of what will come from the office of the president” (Nelson 2013:77). The public role of presidents often means they face an excessive deal of scrutiny when issues come up that require them to pacify and please contending constituencies, “many presidents decide to keep their powder dry and let others carry on the battle” (Duderstadt 2007:226). The unique nature of the position means that college presidents “face many risks every time they speak in public because their opinions on social and

political issues often garner much attention” (Cole and Harper 2017:319). In regards to race and racism, it is common for the leaders of universities to avoid forays into these topics (Cole and Harper 2017, Garcia et al 2020, Hypolite and Stewart 2021).

Scholars, especially those who research crisis management and crisis communication, have explored statements by university presidents around racialized incidents located on university grounds. Examples include a student at the University of Missouri drawing a swastika and writing the word “heil,” both references to Nazism, on the wall of a residence hall stairway, students at Arizona State University throwing a “Black Party” and the white nationalist march at the University of Virginia (Martin and Stee 2020, Cole and Harper 2017, Gigliotti 2019). Moerschell and Novak define a crisis as “an event that causes immediate danger to the institution's staff, students and stakeholders, its physical structure, or reputation” (2020:30). At institutions of higher education, crisis is seen as inevitable, a matter of ‘when rather than if’, and administrative leadership prepares each year for that eventuality (Gigliotti 2019, Moerschell and Novak 2020). When racialized violence occurs on a campus it is common for senior-level administrators to release carefully crafted official statements in response to the negative publicity that accompany these events (Cole and Harper 2017). The messages released during and after a crisis, so-called “crisis communication,” is often “associated with a ‘public relation’ attempt to protect the organization’s actors and reputation” (Moerschell and Novak 2020:30). A damaged reputation has the possibility of causing a great deal of financial harm to an institution, a potentially fatal blow in an era of increased fiscal pressures. The executive leader of a college or university, as the person tasked with securing the financial longevity of their institution, is keenly aware of the need for



responsiveness to stakeholders, though this can be difficult when the values and expectations of the various constituencies do not align.

Crisis events “often influence the operations of finances of an organization” as seen at the University of Missouri after the racialized violence and ensuing protests in 2015 (Gigliotti 2019:5). In 2017, there was a steep decline in enrollment and 400 staff jobs were eliminated and seven residence halls temporarily closed due to budget cuts (Gigliotti 2019). While presidents may have been reluctant to speak on issues of race and racial violence college students across the United States “have submitted formal demands that their universities acknowledge their histories and change their practices, policies, and treatment of all people from underrepresented backgrounds but particularly African-American students” (Anderson and Span 2016:650). Colleges and universities, like the corporations after which they have modeled themselves, “face stiff competition and students who want what they want and when they want it” (Alfred and Rosevear 2000:7). Though students are a considerable source of funding for universities, and university leaders focused on the economic health of their institution should pay close attention to their values and expectations, the maintenance and strengthening of relationships with local, state, and federal government officials and donors is also considered a priority (Ruben et al 2021).

Although researchers have examined racialized incidents on university campuses (Davis and Harris 2016, Garcia et al, Martin and Stee 2020), little research examines the statements issued by university leadership when confronted with national news about racialized violence outside of the university’s purview (Cole and Harper 2017). Scholars have investigated statements made by university leaders regarding other contentious sociopolitical issues, such as the 2016 presidential election (Hypolite and Stewart 2021) and the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

or DACA (Andrade and Lundberg 2020, Squire et al. 2019). Researchers found that concerns over student protests or pressure from the public were catalysts to responses from university leaders, and that the statements were rarely explicit in identifying the systems and structures that disproportionately harmed specific members of their campuses (Hypolite and Stewart 2021).

### **The Southeastern Conference**

This research analyzes statements released by the executive leaders, (e.g. chancellors or presidents) of schools in the Southeastern Conference (SEC). SEC schools are located in states which have historical and contemporary associations with racism and antagonism towards civil right for Black people in the United States (Stephenson 2012, Updegrave et al. 2020). Racial prejudice directly correlates with white people's support of excessive force by the police towards African Americans (Barkan and Cohn 1998). These associations mean that responses by college presidents in the SEC regarding racialized incidences or violence perpetrated by the police have the potential of being especially fraught.

In the United States, universities with athletic teams are divided into different groups known as conferences. The SEC formed in 1932 and developed out of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association that was formed in the late 1800s to “establish common rules, settle disputes, and provide general regulation and control of collegiate athletics” (Walsh 2006:9). Colleges in this area remained segregated until the 1960s “and this segregated norm provided an important bond linking white schools” (Swanson 2015:172). In 1955 when Georgia Tech was still part of the SEC, the Georgia governor asked the university to withdrawal from a bowl game because their opponent was integrated and in Louisiana and Mississippi, lawmakers “passed legislation prohibiting schools from competing against integrated teams” (Walsh 2006:38). Ole Miss did not have its first

Black players until 1972, ten years after the school was integrated, an event that led to protests (Walsh 2006).

Currently, fourteen institutions comprise the SEC conference: University of Alabama, University of Arkansas, Auburn University, University of Georgia (UGA), University of Florida, University of Kentucky, Louisiana State University, University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), Mississippi State University, University of Missouri (Mizzou), University of South Carolina, the University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University, and Vanderbilt University. All of the schools in this conference are historically white universities, all are public institutions except for Vanderbilt University and every institution except for the University of Missouri are located within states that were part of the Confederacy. The Confederate States of America, or the Confederacy, were a group of states that seceded from the United States of America beginning in 1860 (Stephenson 2012). The Confederacy fought a civil war against the United States of America until 1865 in an effort to retain the right to hold Black people in chattel slavery (Stephenson 2012).

In 2020, when George Floyd was murdered, every school in the SEC was located in a state with a Republican state government “trifecta,” with the governorship and the majority of state house and senate seats controlled by that party (Ballotpedia 2022). Governing boards, who hire the SEC executives, are intensely political and often very sensitive to the desires and expectations of their political constituencies (Duderstadt 2000). Opposition to Black Lives Matters, a movement that many perceive as a threat to mainstream institutions, including the police, “is highest in the south and southeast part of the United States” (Updegrave et al. 2020: 96-97). In every state where an SEC school is located, the electoral votes went to Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. In a speech in 2017, Trump stated that “officers should not be

concerned about preventing physical harm to people being taken into custody” (McManus et al. 2019:1040). His statement was a reminder that many white people do not expect police to equally uphold the civil rights of Black and Brown people. In the United States, the Black body is almost synonymous with oppression, hate, and violence and inherently less worthy of protection (Iheme 2020). White people in the United States have used police as agents of social control over Black people for hundreds of years, and white supremacists are able to express and enforce their hostility towards Black people through the American police (Iheme 2020:234).

The presidents and chancellors of the SEC decided to release statements after the murder of George Floyd, a public issue that may seem to have no direct link to their institutions. Since this decision is atypical of university leaders, it is useful to investigate these statements and to consider the purpose of these statements. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods and methodology for this examination and its appropriateness for addressing my research question.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

If university presidents are choosing to speak about a highly controversial issue, where they normally would not, it is important to question why they are speaking, what they are including or excluding in these highly curated texts, and why that matters. Hence, my study. This chapter provides a discussion of the methods and methodology used to analyze the public statements of SEC presidents and chancellors and why it is appropriate for this research. In addition, I define and describe the chosen sample. Next, I discuss how the data were collected, stored, and analyzed. Finally, it will discuss the positionality of the researcher in relation to this research.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method used to investigate the relationship between “discursive practices, events, and texts” and hegemonic structures that are often concealed in society (Fairclough 2013:93). Discourse analysis is the study of language and how meaning is made, including the actions we take when language is used (Gee and Handford 2012). The tasks of discourse analysis include identifying and describing different kinds of communication, discerning how and when communication is used, and using that knowledge to build theories about communication (Bloor and Bloor 2013).

CDA extends discourse analysis with a critical agenda. It “assumes that power relations are discursive”; its analysts actively seek “to draw out and describe the practice and conventions in and behind texts that reveal political and ideological investment” (Manchin and Mayr 2012:4). When using CDA, one examines texts and speeches for words and linguistical and grammatical elements that may be overlooked by the casual reader because they have been so normalized in society but are actually a tactical choice on the part of the writer or speaker for their own interests

or the interests of a group (Machin and Mayr 2012). CDA exposes the linguistic choices that seem to be “common sense” but actually play a substantial part in producing and reproducing power disparities (Fairclough 1989).

My thesis focuses on the way that the SEC presidents and chancellors chose to classify different social actors; themselves, university stakeholders; specifically, faculty, staff, and students, George Floyd, and the police. Included in this analysis are these leaders’ decisions to include or omit people or groups.

### **Corpus**

For this research, I chose to focus on the statements of the highest executive at each campus in the SEC.<sup>3</sup> George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020. The data in this paper include sixteen official communications which were posted on university websites, Twitter, and Facebook from May 29, 2020, through June 5, 2021.<sup>4</sup> To me, a week seemed like enough time for every university to make a statement, since timeliness is an important part of crisis communication, while also not creating a corpus that was too large in scope for me to do a thorough analysis (Diers-Lawson 2019). The statements were publicly available and so this research project was exempted by University of Tennessee, Knoxville the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All statements were in text format except for that of the University of Florida, whose president released only a video without transcribed text. In the cases of Auburn University and the University of Georgia, their presidents released two statements. All of these statements were downloaded and saved to my

---

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for explanation of collegiate leadership

<sup>4</sup> All statements are cited in Appendix B.

computer.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the video statement released by the University of Florida, I watched the video and manually created a transcription, which I then saved with the other text documents. The first statement from the president of Auburn University (UA), the two statements from the president of the University of Georgia (UGA), and the statements from the interim president of Louisiana State University (LSU), and the president of Mississippi State University (MSU) statements were released on a social media platform, either Facebook or Twitter, rather than being made available on the president's official webpage of their university. Twitter has a limit of 280 characters, which means relevant details might be excluded for the sake of brevity; however, in these cases the tweets were images of text, so the limit is not applicable in these cases. The average word count of the statements was 468. The longest statement was issued by the president of Texas A&M University (TAMU) with 946 words and the shortest statement was eight-five words and was released by the president of MSU.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Following data collection, I printed all the statements and read them. I highlighted words and phrases about law enforcement, George Floyd, other victims of police or extrajudicial murder, and if the writer described specific actions or programs that would be implemented. After reading all of the statements, I noticed some common phrases that were repeated in the various texts, so I reread all of the statements and highlighted words or phrases that were

---

<sup>5</sup> University of South Carolina President Bob Caslen resigned May 12, 2021. His statement has been removed from the President Communications page on the University of South Carolina website. Appendix C is a copy of the webpage text.

commonly used, including words like, “inclusion,” “diversity,” “values,” “death,” “tragedy.” During this time, I also read books and articles by theorists who have developed and used Critical discourse analysis like Machin, Mayr, Fairclough, van Dijk, and van Leeuwen. Reading their work, while reading and rereading the texts, gave me the opportunity to recognize numerous discursive practices that were used, but I chose to focus on only a few for the purpose of this thesis. In the subsequent chapter, I elaborate on the discursive strategies utilized by the SEC presidents and chancellors.

### **Trustworthiness of Researcher**

My goal is to emulate other faithful “practitioners of CDA...who see things wrong with their societies, see language as involved in what is wrong, and are committed to making changes through forms of intervention” (Fairclough 1996:52). For me, that means that I have chosen to critically analyze texts that include the discourse of someone who has direct influence over my livelihood. Unlike many of the CDA researchers I quoted in this work, I am Black and a woman, and while I work in academia, I do not benefit from the “academic freedom” that is often enjoyed by faculty members. I am a stakeholder at an SEC institution, as both a staff member and a student. Since this discourse is meant to influence me as a constituent, I am not engaging in the discourse released by my university’s president as a purely neutral observer. I am a Black woman, with a Black father, and a Black brother, and hundreds of other Black family members and friends. George Floyd’s murder is not an event that I can look at with disinterest. A common narrative in academia persists that “subjectivity implies a lack of rigor, whether methodologically or analytically” (Gardner et al. 2017). Critical discourse analysis is inherently political. It stands on the side of the dominated and oppressed and points at the ways that the powerful create, replicate,



and uphold dominance in their speech and writing (van Dijk 1993). My choice of methodology is grounded in a tradition of researchers who employed this method to understand important social issues with the hope that their work would contribute to action that caused substantive change for those who suffered from injustice and social inequality. While academic elites (white men) may have decided a century ago that neutrality was the mark of a good researcher and good research, I have no interest in that (Evan 2016, Gardner et al 2017, van Dijk 1993).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS

When the SEC presidents and chancellors decided to write, or tweet, or speak about the murder of George Floyd, this was an unusual choice. It is very unlike university presidents, who tend to stay silent on issues not directly related to their constituencies. Their use of discursive strategies when issuing these statements was typical, even if the act of addressing a tumultuous sociopolitical issue was not. The SEC presidents and chancellors employed a plethora of discursive practices, including the use of metaphors and modal verbs. Though often associated with poetry, metaphors are an integral way of understanding the world around us by “representing one aspect of experience in terms of another” (Fairclough 1989:119). Modal verbs, like *shall, will, can’t, must, might, can, would, should, may* are auxiliary verbs that express probability or ability (Fairclough 1989, Machin and Mayr 2012). In addition, these university leaders employed the discursive strategy of exclusion, which is accomplished through backgrounding or suppression (van Leeuwen 2009). This is where the social actors, particular the agent, or participant who is performing an action, is either placed in a less prominent part of the discourse or left out altogether. Each of these strategies will be examined in the analysis that follows.

#### **Representation of Social Actors**

When the SEC presidents and chancellors released their statements, they talk not only about themselves but include discussions of other individuals and groups. An important part of any discourse is how a communicator chooses to represent “social actors/participants” – that is, an

individual or groups of individuals (Machin and Mayr 2012:77). The author of some statement – often in collaboration with other decision-makers – is guided by how they want to be seen by recipients and how recipients should see themselves and their place in society. Since elite members of society have extraordinary access to forms of mass communication (van Dijk 1995), they have the unique opportunity to define and classify people and groups, “even impos[ing] an identity on individuals that they may find unwelcome” (Bloor and Bloor 2007:86). Elite discourse writers have the ability to imbue themselves with certain rights, privilege, and power and this is forced upon the reader, who in turn is dictated to in regard to the characteristics that are inherent to their role or to the group to which they have been categorized (Bloor and Bloor 2007, van Dijk 1995). When dominant people or groups are creating discourse, they have the power to include or omit certain people or groups or to emphasize aspects of their identity. Elite writers and speakers are able to create discourse that speaks positively about themselves and people and groups (like the police) that support them and help to maintain their dominance or draw attention to negative acts by subjected groups, like people of color or immigrants. In the case of the SEC university presidents, they use their elite status to categorize and describe a plethora of social actors including themselves, numerous university stakeholders, the police, and George Floyd.

### **Metaphor of Family**

A metaphor is “a tool for representing one entity or event in terms of some other related entity without explicitly stating a likeness” (Bloor and Bloor 2007). Metaphors are so normalized in everyday speech that the average reader may not see that metaphors are also a powerful discursive strategy because they “can be deliberately persuasive and often conceal underlying power relations” (Machin and Mayr 2012:221). In their statements, SEC presidents and

chancellors highlighted the common connection of stakeholders to the university. Rather than many people with differing views and values, students, faculty, staff, and others were a “family,” “community” or “nation” (Gogue 2020b, Galligan 2020, Fuchs 2020). While families have the general connotation of being safe and stable, this is not the experience that everyone has with family. While the SEC presidents and chancellors may use the metaphor of family to invoke a sense of safety and stability, there are many negative aspects of familial connection that are more indicative of the experience some people at these institutions deal with. While families may be singular units that care about each other, family members generally do not have equal rights, privileges, responsibilities, and duties. Families are not typically egalitarian; the children have less autonomy and power than the adults. Even among the spouses, there can be a hierarchical power structure (Fairclough 1989). While some people have a wonderful experience with their families, for other people, their family is a source of destruction and oppression (Machin and Mayr 2012). Family members can be indifferent to each other, detest each other, and even actively try to hurt each other. For Black people who are part of these institutions, these negative features are likely to be more consistent with their experience with their university “family.” It is not this complicated understanding on family that the SEC leaders want their audience to think about, but rather the metaphor in its most simplified form as an expression of solidarity and a way to inspire unity (Bloor and Bloor 2007).

The SEC leaders who wrote these statements, and some of the stakeholders who are part of the intended audience, like the governing board or the state legislature, are far more powerful than many of the students, faculty, staff, parents, and other constituents who are part of the “family.” This power imbalance is important to recognize because the metaphor “family,”

“community,” “nation,” invokes a sense of solidarity and shared beliefs and support for members within that same group (Bloor and Bloor 2007, Fairclough 2000). The family is a singular unit with a common background and sense of loyalty towards the members of that group. The family has the same worldview, are united, and the members care about and for each other (Bloor and Bloor 2007, Machin and Mayr 2012). It was not the various university constituents who decided they were part of this “family” nor are they the ones who will define and describe the shared beliefs or common interests they hold. This privilege of dictating both identity and solidarity is held by the SEC presidents and chancellors who wrote these statements. While using the metaphor of “family,” among others, may seem benign, it is a tactic that obscures the way different constituents actually feel or relate to other stakeholders of their university.

Having labeled the constituents in terms of family, the SEC leaders then define the qualities that the group members hold in common. It is not simply that they attend or work at the institution that makes them a part of the “community” or “family” but rather shared values.

“At The University of Alabama our core principles include fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect for every member of our community...bias, violence and acts of hate contradict those values” (Bell 2020).

“As our core values reflect, better understanding of our shared humanity is the foundation of our mission to build a better world. That includes caring about the safety, health and wellbeing of all of those around us” (Steinmetz 2020).

“While we acknowledge the painful reality that prejudice and bigotry exist, we stand resolute that they have no place in the Auburn Family. As an institution that values and

embraces each individual, we oppose hate and exclusion and acts that promote them. It was on my heart to reaffirm Auburn's values" (Gogue 2020a).

"As our university family processes the painful recent events that have stunned the nation, I challenge all of us to hold fast to MSU's core values of diversity, inclusion, tolerance and respect for others and to strive together to assure that whose values do not waver or change" (Keenum 2020).

"Our Tiger community also follows a code of conduct that we expect Mizzou students, faculty and staff to live up to as a part of our core values of Respect, Responsibility, Discovery and Excellence" (Choi 2020).

"Our Carolinian Creed calls on us to *respect the dignity of all persons, to respect the rights and property of others, to discourage bigotry, while striving to learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions*. Violence and hateful rhetoric are not reflective of those values" (Caslen 2020).

"As a university, as a community and as a nation, we must remember that our history and our future are informed by the values that guide us and the ideals that shape us. Honor. Integrity. Respect. And selfless service to each other and all of those around us" (Young 2020).

Defining the different people in the university in this way is very useful because the SEC chancellors and presidents know that many people imagine the family "as a self-contained group of loving and mutually supportive members united against the outside world" (Bloor and Bloor 2007:77). After the individuals are grouped through the metaphor "family," which invokes a sense of unity, the qualities of that "family" are then described, specifically the values that should be

seen as inherent characteristics of those people who are members include ideas like “diversity,” “inclusion,” “caring for others,” and “respect.” This reflects a trend in wider to society around “extolling the virtues of difference, celebrating diversity as a value in itself, and describing diversity as a new cornerstone of American idealism” (Bell and Hartmann 2007:895). While these are essential ideas for the achievement of a more equitable society, these terms do not go far enough to achieve the anti-racist work required to dismantle a criminal justice system that murders people. Black people have not been murdered by police in the United States because of the lack of diversity and inclusion (Roberson 2020).

Whether the “Auburn Family,” “Aggie Community,” “Gator Nation,” the SEC presidents and chancellors also include themselves among the “family” members through the use of pronouns like “we” or “our” (Gogue 2020a, Young 2020, Fuchs 2020). Even though these institutional leaders and the people they are speaking to and for may not share the same ideologies, the use of the pronoun “we” is useful for “blur[ring] that fact”, especially since all the individuals, presidents and chancellors included, are a family (Bloor and Bloor 2007:118).

### ***Pronoun “We”***

Presidents have authority over the college or university they have been hired to lead, both in that they are able to command some of the stakeholders (but not all, since their boards of trustees and general community can also be considered stakeholders) and to be able to speak on behalf of those stakeholders. Though the presidents and chancellors of the SEC align themselves as co-members of the campus “family” in their discourses, they also use that authority to make commitments, not just for themselves but for everyone who falls under the pronoun “we.” Sometimes when the presidents say “we,” or “our,” they are referring to an “inclusive” we meaning

themselves and the “family,” while other times they are speaking of an “exclusive” we, meaning themselves and a few other people (Fairclough 1989, Fairclough 2000). The differences can be seen in the statement by USC’s president,

We must do the work of educating ourselves about the harmful impact of racism and discrimination in all of its manifestation. (Caslen 2020)

To this end, we are assembling a team to work on the implementation of a new diversity module that will be required of all UofSC freshman (sic) as part of their orientation process beginning in the 2020-2021 academic year. (Caslen 2020)

The latter sentence by Caslen is an example of the “exclusive” we; this “we” pertains only to himself and a select few people at the university who would have the authority to create and apply new programming for their incoming students. This is different from the “we” in the previous statement, which is a form of the inclusive “we,” meaning all those who have been classified as “Gamecocks” (2020). The inclusive “we” is often vague, obscuring differences between individuals (Fairclough 2000). When the SEC presidents and chancellors use the “inclusive” we, they are also obfuscating the power relations between themselves and the other individuals who are encompassed in the “we” as well as concealing the fact that only a small number of people at the university actually have the power to make structural changes at those institutions and the faculty, staff, and students are not among that number (Fairclough 2000, Machin and Mayr 2012). “We” allows the president to assimilate themselves to the “community” and make claims about and commitments on behalf of the entire group (Fairclough 1989).



## Use of Modals and Abstraction

Modality is a system through which communicators express their opinion about something or how committed they are to an idea without necessarily invoking a specific command or making concrete promise (Fairclough 1989, Machin and Mayr 2012). Modal verbs like *can*, *must*, *will*, *should*, and so forth are among of the ways in which modality is achieved (Fairclough 1989, Machin and Mayr 2012). When a communicator uses modals, it tells the audience something about the identity of the speaker or writer and about how much power they have. Communicators with a great deal of power may be more likely to compel others to action or to make promises about something. Of course, it is possible for a communicator to indicate that they want (or want others) to fulfill a promise or take an action without providing details about how or when or by whom that task will be accomplished. The actions they will take are abstracted, or made general and vague, so that the communicator gives an impression that something is being done (Machin and Mayr 2012). What follows are examples of how these discursive practices are used in tandem by the presidents and chancellors of the SEC.

Bell (UA) wrote, “As a community, we must remain united in our resolve to address such injustices in meaningful ways” (2020). Bell does not provide additional details about how injustices will be “addressed” only that the community must “remain united in [their] resolve” to do so. The use of abstraction, or the generalization of action, gives the reader the impression that something will be done “without specifying what that is” (Machin and Mayr 2012:116). Auburn’s president wrote a similar statement, “As your president, I commit that we as an institution will seek meaningful action to confront the pain, fear, systemic racism and injustice faced by the black community” (Gogue 2020b). Interim Vanderbilt (VU) Chancellor Susan Wentz wrote, “We need

to draw on our strength as an institution of scholarship and discovery to uncover truth, to support individual and collective actions within our community, and to offer meaningful ways forward to help society heal” (2020). Neither Bell, Gogue, or Wentz take the opportunity to expound on what “meaningful” ways or actions will be taken or how those will be measured, which gives the reader the opportunity to make those estimations for themselves. “Committing” and “doing” are not the same, the discourse does not provide the details regarding what actually will be done, when, and by whom (Ahmed 2012, Machin and Mayr 2012).

The statement by Auburn University president Jay Gogue includes many examples of the use of modals and abstraction and what follows is a more in-depth investigation of the text.

Gogue is the only SEC leader to specifically describe the formation of a task force. Regarding this initiative he says,

In the near term, I will form a task force to guide the university through meaningful change. Members of the task force will be asked to gather ideas from the Auburn Family, prioritize next steps, develop implementation plans and hold us accountable as a university. We will soon provide more information. (2020b)

Though Gogue provides a timeline for the creation of his taskforce, “the near term” is not a specific date in regards of accountability. He does not provide any details about how the members will be selected and what skills, knowledge, or characteristics qualify them for selection. These are the people who are meant to “guide” the university, and yet AU’s president does not elaborate on who is competent enough to take on that task. Again, Gogue uses the word “meaningful” but fails to define meaningful or how it will be measured and by whom. The first item the task force is asked to complete is to “gather ideas from the Auburn Family.” Here too, the details are

abstracted, and the reader is left to decide what kind of ideas the task force wants and who will be solicited for those ideas. The use of the metaphor “family” is especially discursive here, because it implies that all the ideas that come from members of the “Auburn family” support the meaningful change the task force is charged with helping to implement. Even if Gogue only considered the current students, staff, and faculty as eligible to contribute ideas for consideration by his task force, that is still thousands of people, who all bring “unique perspectives, preferences, expectations, and desires” (Bender and Lawrence 2021:45). More importantly, the issues of police brutality and violence do not affect every member of the campus equally, and Gogue does not acknowledge that the ideas of African Americans need to take precedence. In addition to gathering ideas, the task force also has the responsibility to “prioritize next steps, develop implementation plans and hold us accountable” (2020b). While there are numerous actions presented in this sentence, Gogue refrains from specifying how and when all this will happen: the reader is only told that more information will be provided “soon.” In these three sentences, Gogue uses the personal pronouns “I” and “us” in the inclusive form, and the exclusive “we.” His use of the modal verb “will” after “I” is important because it is the only time in the text the modal is used only when referring to himself and not the “family” and includes a defined task that has the authority to dictate, that is, the creation of a task force.

Gogue concludes his statement by providing a list of “imperatives” he wants stakeholders of the university, specifically “all students, faculty, and staff to embrace” (2020b).

1. We must be honest with each other and recognize that discrimination against African Americans and other people of color exists and is wrong. There is hate that is festering. We can and must do something about it.

2. We must remember that silence is not acceptable. When we see something wrong, we must speak up.
3. We must treat all people with respect and civility as individuals, not as groups.
4. We must demand that all laws of the land are administered fairly and equally.
5. We must listen to the voices of those who have been disenfranchised and do what we can to help.

Gogue, as the president of this institution, is trying to compel his specified constituencies by using the modal verb “must.” While “must” displays confidence that these actions are appropriate, he does not use the more authoritative modal verb “will,” which gives a higher sense of certainty and commitment to these actions being accomplished. The modal “must” is useful for Gogue, and other elites, because he can be seen as addressing an issue while being ambiguous about when these things will happen and other relevant details (Machin and Mayr 2012). His hesitancy towards full commitment is likely due to the contentious nature of this list and his inability to enforce these standards or to force his constituents to meet these requirements.

Unfortunately, while Gogue may be perceived as sincere and decisive through his choice of modal verbs, he does not provide concrete details or processes regarding how these can be completed by the students, faculty and staff. What happened to George Floyd was not just a case of discrimination, but an example of the ongoing terrorism experienced by African Americans when they have an altercation with the police. Gogue encourages his constituents to speak up when they “see something wrong,” but he does not provide additional details about what constitutes wrong and to whom they should report that wrongdoing. Gogue asks that his audience “treat all

people with respect and civility,” glossing over the reality that it is not “all people” who are being treated with disrespect, but in this case a Black man who was murdered. Gogue goes on to urge this group to demand fairness and equity in how the laws are administered, but does not acknowledge that the laws in America are not necessarily just. In addition, he does not illuminate the people or groups that his students, staff, and faculty should entreat for this equitable administration. Finally, he promotes the idea that his stakeholders should listen and aid those who have been disenfranchised. He does not elaborate on who is included among those marginalized “voices” or why, and does not provide any concrete action for assisting them. In all of these statements, Gogue uses verbs like “recognize,” “remember,” “speak,” “demand,” “listen,” or “help” but does not supply tangible and measurable ways that these actions will be achieved.

It might be possible to argue that the SEC presidents and chancellors were simply omitting the fine details of their plans for brevity. Or that the desire to release a timely statement did not allow them the opportunity to fully formulate actionable goals. However, the discursive strategies that were previously described become even more problematic when every SEC leader also employed some element of the discursive practice of exclusion.

### **Exclusion**

When analyzing text using CDA, it is important to investigate not just what was included in the discourse but what is absent. Just as the inclusion and emphasis on certain social actors and actions is important to question, it is equally important to determine what a writer or speaker gains for omitting relevant details from their discourse (Garcia et al. 2020, Machin and Mayr 2012). While the SEC president and chancellors released these statements to address the murder of George Floyd by the police, they chose to employ the discursive strategy of exclusion. Exclusion is a

discursive practice that pertains to the representation of social actors and their actions in a discourse (Baker and Ellece 2011). Exclusion, like inclusion, is not benign. It is a choice that speakers and writers make because it “suits their interests and purposes in relation” to their intended audience (van Leeuwen 2008:28). Backgrounding is considered a less radical form of exclusion because the agent, or social actor responsible for an action, is deemphasized, rather than omitted altogether and this inclusion allows the reader to “infer with reasonable (though never total) certainty who they are” (van Leeuwen 2008:29).

### ***Backgrounding***

The message by University of South Carolina (USC) President Bob Caslen was the most explicit among the 16 statements in my sample in linking police violence to the deaths of African Americans like George Floyd stating,

With heavy hearts, we mourn the horrific killing of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer while three other officers stood by in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our thoughts go out to Floyd’s family and to the families of all of those who have been the victims of violent murders fueled by racism and hatred in our country. (2020)

Caslen’s statement, though including agent, patient, and action, does not specifically say that the police are guilty of “violent murder fueled by racism and hatred” (2020). University of Florida (UF) President Fuchs also linked the murder of George Floyd to police action, calling it a “needless police killing” (2020). In describing the action of police officers as “needless killing,” the reader may assume that President Fuchs recognizes that there are times when killings by police officers are necessary.

Joe Steinmetz, University of Arkansas (UARK) Chancellor, in writing about George Floyd's murder, called it a "senseless death" and a "tragedy" (2020). Steinmetz's statement is an illustration of backgrounding because it does not mention the police in relation to George Floyd's death, but he does talk about policing as a "touch point where bias and systemic inequality may appear" (2020).

In addition, the chancellor's statement employs the use of the discursive practice "structural opposition," which defines one group in contrast to another, even when those social actors, the Minneapolis police, are not mentioned (Machin and Mayr 2012). Steinmetz describes the police force at the university and his local city saying,

UAPD Chief Steve Gahagans and I are of like mind in wanting to ensure that everyone interacting with law enforcement is treated with the compassion, civility and respect they deserve. We owe that to anyone who steps foot on campus - or off campus and into our community, for that matter - to treat people fairly and equally. I know Mayor Lionel Jordan and Fayetteville Chief of Police Mike Reynolds and his officers feel the same. Our police departments do an excellent job of keeping our community safe. (2020)

In this way, he positions the UAPD and the Fayetteville police in opposition to the Minneapolis police who murdered George Floyd. Positioning is a discursive practice used by discourse creators to assign themselves or others a position that has specific responsibilities, duties, privileges, and rights associated with it (Davies and Harre 1990). University of Arkansas students should not worry about their police, because they are not like the police who committed murder. Police are an "elite white intuition" and statements like this work to uphold an important mainstream narrative that "the police [are] helpers and protectors of us all" (van Dijk 1993:266, Fairclough

1989:40). Everyone who engages with discourse is a participant who is trying to “make (or attempt to make) their own and each other’s action socially determinate” (David and Harre 1990:45). When USC President Caslen writes about the police in this way, he tells the audience how they should think and feel about the police without regard for the possibility of varied experiences that his stakeholders may have had with the police in general, or even the police in this specific area. While many of the white stakeholders may share this view of the police, his statement about the compassion and civility of law enforcement is in direct contrast with the lived experience of George Floyd and many other African Americans.

University of Tennessee (UTK) Chancellor Donde Plowman starts her statement with “George Floyd, his name is George Floyd and he should be alive today” (2020). She does not say why he is no longer alive but does include the words “violence,” “brutality,” and “senseless acts of racism” (2020). Plowman states the “list of black people in America subjected to violence is long and getting longer” and how her “heart aches for so many as senseless acts of racism and violence continue” (2020). Like Steinmetz, her statement backgrounds the police, saying “those who have taken an oath to protect.” Intertextuality is a discursive strategy where elements of another text are incorporated into a discourse and take on the history and voice of that text without necessarily acknowledging those factors (Fairclough 2003). In an instance of intertextuality (Fairclough 2003), this phrasing references “to protect and to serve,” a motto which was adopted by Los Angeles Police Department in 1963 and then by police departments throughout the United States (Ragland 2021). Using this phrase, Plowman’s statement reinforces, rather than negates, the idea of police as public servants who protect members of society. The police did not protect and serve George Floyd, rather they murdered him.



In the statements made by the presidents of the University of Alabama (UA) and the University of South Carolina (USC) the university police are listed among campus resources that are available to provide support. The presentation of police as a resource by USC President Bob Caslen stands in contrast with his earlier statements about the actions of police in the case of George Floyd. White people positioning the police as a resource is problematic, as not every campus stakeholder has the same historical or contemporary experience with the police (Chaney and Robertson 2013). The police brutality that is more commonly experienced by Black people and other People of Color do not make the police a resource to those groups, but rather a menace.

### ***Suppression***

Regarding George Floyd's murder, University of Alabama (UA) President Stuart Bell wrote,

Today my heart is heavy as I reflect on recent tragedies, deaths and incidents of racialized violence across our country. The death of George Floyd is just the latest example of the challenges that our nation faces and a somber reminder of the disproportionate impact such actions have on so many members of our community. (2020)

Bell seems to be linking “challenges” and “actions” to the “recent tragedies, deaths and incidents of racialized violence” mentioned in the previous sentence. Bell says that George Floyd's death is an example of an action linked to racialized violence, but does not name the perpetrator of that violence. The text moves beyond backgrounding, to a radical form of exclusion known as suppression. Suppression removes the agent from the text completely and the removal works to obscure blame. The Texas A&M University (TAMU) president, University of Missouri (Mizzou) interim chancellor, and University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) chancellor

name George Floyd and even go as far as saying he “died violently” but do not say who was responsible for this violence (Young 2020). Similarly, in the second statement issued by Jere Morehead, the University of Georgia (UGA) president, he describes “senseless acts of violence and hate” and “the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery” but does not include any reference to the responsible agent (2020b).

University of Kentucky President Eli Capilouto recites the names of several African Americans, including Breonna Taylor who once attended the institution, who were murdered prior to his address on June 4, 2020. He says that Taylor, along with Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Steven Taylor are part of “a legacy of loss and grief” (2020). “A legacy of loss and grief” is a use of trope “so bland that [it] never force[s] the speaker or enable[s] the listener to touch the realities” (Cohn 1987:690). Capilouto statement avoids discussion of the specific racialized violence and murder committed by police officers and their proxies against African Americans. Unfortunately, his discourse is an example of the blasé attitude the other SEC executive leaders have in regards to explicitly discussing police brutality.

Many of the SEC presidents and chancellor’s statements call the murder of George Floyd “senseless,” “tragic,” “brutal,” but do not disclose that the brutality was murder carried out by the police. Their discourse concealed or minimized the role of the police rather than specifically naming these agents of state violence as the actors responsible for the death of George Floyd (Van Dijk 2008). However harmful the omission of the agent, the discourse is even more insidious when every social actor is erased.

### *Corpus Delicti*

Corpus delicti is a Latin term that is defined as the “body of the crime” or the elements that must be proven to establish that a crime has actually been committed (Greene 2003). The term was appropriated into English common law as “no body, no murder/crime” in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the concept was used in the American legal system and has been appropriated into popular culture (Greene 2003). In examining the discourse by the SEC presidents and chancellors, I noticed the erasure of the victim, George Floyd, from some of the statements. When the name of the victim was so widely known, concealing or excluding that pertinent information seemed to be a deliberate action of discursion. When discussing the murder of George Floyd, the clearest way to convey the relevant information to a reader is to name the agent, the patient or the person who is being acted upon, and the action. In this case, “A police officer, Derek Chauvin, murdered George Floyd.” This concise statement brings all the relevant social actors and action to the foreground. The final five statements will utilize a discursive practice that goes beyond the previously identified forms of exclusion; suppression or backgrounding of the agent, to omitting the patient as well. These texts omit the police, George Floyd, and in most cases, do not even use the word “death” not to mention “killing” or “murder.”

In the first statements released by the presidents of Auburn and UGA, no social actors, that is, neither agent or patient are listed. Morehead (UGA) wrote about “senseless death and violence,” and Gogue’s text (Auburn) discusses “recent events of racial injustice,” but omits any mention of the police or George Floyd (2020a, 2020a). Gogue’s second message, which was released a week later, mentions a “brutal death” but no agent(s) or patient is named in the over four-hundred-word statement (2020b). George Floyd’s murder by police is summarized by LSU Interim President

Tom Galligan as a “horrifying and heartbreaking event” (2020). Mark Keenum, the president of Mississippi State University, gives a similar summation of the murder of George Floyd as a “painful recent event” (2020). Both Galligan and Keenum use the term “injustice” in their text, with Keenum also including the words “racism [and] violence.” It is for every reader to make meaning for themselves in regards to who was involved, what happened, and why. The action of these texts is an “event,” not a killing or a murder. The removal of agent, the exclusion of police, leaves the reader with no one to blame. Finally, George Floyd, the patient, is deleted from the discourse. With so much detail omitted, one questions if anything bad really happened at all.

George Floyd was a person. His life mattered. The discourse released by these SEC presidents and chancellors does not give one the sense that it did. They were unwilling to say his name, to state his was murdered, to explicitly mention who was responsible for that murder. Instead they chose to background and suppress. And it was a choice. The longest statement was almost nine hundred fifty words, and it is reasonable to think that every president could have written any length of statement desired. They were not limited to a specific word count, and so a need for brevity could not be an excuse. Of course, a long statement is not proof of the lack of discursive strategy, since the lengthy statement by TAMU president also did not discuss police brutality and violence. Avoiding transparency regarding the police and their responsibility for the murder of George Floyd was not a mistake, but a deliberate tactic to be seen as addressing the divisive political topic of police violence and murder of Black people, while being as apolitical as possible.

Systemic racism and police brutality are contentious topics that university presidents and chancellors would have avoided releasing statements on in the past, but the murder of George Floyd was an exception to that norm (Bender and Lawrence 2021). After his murder, the presidents

and chancellors of the SEC made public statements which expressed their own personal grief and sadness, and using abstracted language discussed plans involving “diversity” and “inclusion” but avoided specific discussion about the police and police brutality and murder (Schwartz 2020). George Floyd’s death did not just happen, but when the responsible actors are removed, it makes it seem like there is no one to blame. The power and dominance of social elites is maintained, in part, by the police who enforce laws and have been imbued with power from the government to commit violence and the choice to omit them and their action in their statements about George Floyd’s murder is not an act of carelessness, but rather abuse of power (van Dijk 1993, van Dijk 2008, White 2016)

Many colleges and universities in the United States are in a precarious financial situation and the executive leaders at those institutions of higher education are tasked with providing fiscal stability. A goal which causes increased pursuit of financial support from students, businesses, and legislatures. Decreased funding in higher education by the federal government, as well as a waning population of traditional college-age students, means that presidents and chancellors are keenly aware of their need to strengthen “the connections with the critical stakeholder groups, especially those that provide sources of funding” (Ruben et al 2021:33). Unfortunately, the various stakeholders at their institutions often do not have the same desires, ideals, and expectations and those differences can lead to tension in how university leaders choose to address particularly difficult issues (Duderstadt 2000). What the presidents and chancellors of the SEC included and excluded in their statements was not decided flippantly, but was instead an attempt to satiate as many stakeholders as possible while alienating as few as possible. Universities are highly dependent on revenue from student tuition and in 2020, when George Floyd was murdered, the

cohort of traditional students, those age 18 to 25, attending colleges and universities were from Generation Z (Gen Z), or the generation born after 1996 (Parker and Igielnik 2020). Gen Z is more racially and ethnically diverse and among the 920 teenagers included in a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center on American trends, two-thirds felt that Black people were not treated as fairly as white people (Parker and Igielnik 2020). Though Gen Z is more liberal than their predecessors, researchers found that regardless of race or political affiliation a large majority of Americans within this generation were supportive of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Rice and Moffett 2022). While support of BLM might be more prevalent among members of Gen Z, white students constitute the majority of students at every SEC institution except Vanderbilt, while Black students comprise between 3-18% of the undergraduate student body at SEC schools and it cannot be assumed that all white student support anti-racist policies (US Department of Education 2021). Even if every student at an SEC institution was personally in favor of their president and institution making statements to affirm anti-racist policy changes, they are not the only stakeholders who provide these colleges and universities with support.

The boards of trustees that hire and terminate the presidents and chancellors of these institutions are themselves chosen by those in political power in their states (e.g. legislatures and governors). At the time of George Floyd's murder, every SEC institution was located in a state run by Republican governors and Republican majority legislatures. In addition, the Republican president of the United States, President Trump, emphasized the ideas of being "tough on crime" and "law and order" (McManus et al 2019:1054). In response to protests over the murder of George Floyd, Donald Trump referred to the protestors as "thugs, looters, terrorist and used the U.S. military to 'dominate' them" (Iheme 2020:245). Trump's political base was majority white

and white people in the United States tend to believe that Black people are more inclined towards committing crimes and that when police murder them, it is done in self-defense (Chaney and Robertson 2013, Itheme 2020 McManus et al. 2019). White people in the U.S. have a “vested interest in maintaining their social and political dominance (Barkan and Cohn 1998:744). This interest often results in racial prejudice and the approval by white people of the police and their use of force. Since police are essential in maintaining the dominance of white people in U.S. society, and white people experience law enforcement in such a disparate way to Black people, they are disinclined to criticize that institution, even when they commit murder (Itheme 2020, Schwartz 2020).

Due in large part to their current and potential financial contributions, university presidents are beholden to a variety of stakeholders beyond the students who pay tuition and fees. When the boards that hired these presidents are themselves selected by Republican legislatures and governors, who in turn are chosen by the majority of the electorate, the presidents and chancellors of the SEC must decide, whose support they can, literally, afford to lose. Tuition and fee revenues are become increasingly important as federal funding declines, and the students providing those revenues are becoming more diverse and are increasingly liberal compared to some of the constituencies of SEC institutions (Updegrave et al. 2020). For institutions of higher education leaders who are working to secure the financial future of their college or university, they must always consider the potential of alienating people those provide their institutions with funding at the forefront of their statements and actions. While the presidents and universities are considered part of the elite and the police support the elite, the discursive strategies used by the presidents and chancellors of SEC universities are employed as

a way to appease the constituents who expect them to address difficult sociopolitical issues while not angering the constituents who do not share progressive world views.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Universities in the United States have historically been constructed as institutions which provide young people with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to be good citizens who contribute to society (Furco 2010, Johnson et al 2003). The austerity policies inspired by neo-liberal ideology in the United States means that public institutions of higher education do not receive all the financial support necessary to remain solvent (Heller 2016). Colleges and universities are highly dependent on additional funding sources in order to remain financially secure. These sources include research funding from government agency, large corporations, and private foundations as well as increased tuition dollars from students attending the institution (Hanley 2005, Heller 2016, Shrecker 2010). The funding required to keep colleges and universities open, means that they have shifted their focus away from their mission to educate and serve the public to securing capital (Heller 2016). Academic capitalism is the way that higher education has come to mimic the structure of corporations in their management, as well as how university leaders and their faculty members engage in market-like behaviors in order to generate revenue-generating activities (Heller 2016, Jessop 2017, Shrecker 2010, Slaughter and Leslie 2001). The task of securing that funding is ultimately the responsibility of the president or chancellor who leads an institution.

University presidents or chancellors have also been charged with speaking on behalf of their institution. It has become the norm, that when difficult sociopolitical issues arise stakeholders of corporations expect those organizations to release statements about issues, even when they fall outside of the normal purview of their business. Since universities have come to model themselves

after corporations in their revenue generating practices, they too have increasingly been pressure to take a public stance on social issues. Universities have a broad range of stakeholders and their varied perspectives, expectations, and values often mean that historically, university presidents have abstained from addressing issues that are considered divisive (Duderstadt 2000, Garcia et al. 2020, Nelson 2013). Among those stakeholders are the boards of trustees and the state legislatures.

University presidents answer to the board of trustees and that board is often chosen by state legislatures (Duderstadt 2000, Nelson 2013, Stripling 2021). Those state legislatures are responsible for allocating funding to colleges and universities (Shrecker 2010). In the case of the SEC, every university in my corpus is located in a state where Republicans hold the majority in their state legislatures (Ballotpedia 2022). Student tuition and fees are increasingly becoming a larger portion of universities funding in the SEC and across the United States (Bender and Lawrence 2021, Ruben et al. 2021, Shrecker 2010). Since students are providing so much capital to the university they are attending, their views and expectations on issues are expected to be reflected in university statements (Bender and Lawrence 2021). The discursive strategies used by university presidents reflects their understanding of the need to make public statements on issues. The goal of their statements is to appease as many constituents as possible while simultaneously alienating as few stakeholders as possible with their words (Duderstadt 2000, Duderstadt 2007, Nelson 2013). They need the money that students bring to their institutions (Stearns 2016). They need that money now, from the progressive Gen Z students who attend their universities, and in the future, from the Black and Brown students who they are recruiting to their institutions. If universities are like corporations, and students are their consumers who need to “buy in,”

presidents and chancellors need to make statements that articulate the ideals that their consumers value (Diers-Lawson 2019, Elving 2013, Jablonkai 2013, Ruben et al 2021).

University presidents release statements to acknowledge sociopolitical incidents when they recognize the potential for a disruption in their relationship with their stakeholders if they abstain from doing so. The murder of George Floyd was one such event. The SEC presidents and chancellors made public pronouncements on university websites, Twitter, and Facebook, which expressed their personal grief and sadness which also included a plethora of discursive strategies. Though there is a lengthy video displaying Chauvin kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, many of the SEC presidents and chancellors avoided naming the police or calling their actions murder (Schwartz 2020). When university presidents chose not to include the police and their specific involvement in the murder of George Floyd, this was not an innocent omission but rather a “form of discursive power abuse” (van Dijk 2008:823). The police are instrumental in enforcing laws that support the power and dominance of societal elites and are “state-sanctioned bearers of violence” (van Dijk 1993, White 2016:86). The statements made by the majority of these university leaders remove the people involved, “and therefore responsibility for the action [is] also...removed. This makes it seem as though events just happen” (Machin and Mayr 2012:140).

When Donald J. Trump became President in 2016, “tensions between law enforcement and Black Americans had escalated to a high level (McManus et al 2019:1054). Rather than working to “bind the citizenry together,” Trump, whose political base was mostly white, emphasized the ideas of being “tough on crime” and “law and order” (McManus et al 2019:1054). In response to protests over the murder of George Floyd, Trump referred to the protestors as “thugs, looters, terrorist and used the U.S. military to ‘dominate’ them” (Iheme 2020:245). In 2020, every

president and chancellor in the SEC was white presenting, except for the interim chancellor of Missouri, Mun Y. Choi. White people in America have a “vested interest in maintaining their social and political dominance (Barkan and Cohn 1998:744). This interest often results in racial prejudice and the approval by whites of the police and their use of force. Police in the United States have been an avenue through which the “deeply encrusted culture of hate and oppression against Black people” in the United States can be expressed and enforced (Iheme 2020:227). White people tend to “believe that Blacks are disproportionately inclined to engage in criminal behavior and are the deserving on harsh treatment by the criminal justice system” (Chaney and Robertson 2013:484). For African Americans, the rate of fatal shootings by the police is higher than any other racial group at thirty fatal shoots per million (Schwartz 2020). Even in the case where Black people are not killed by the police there are other miseries “that await any interaction with America’s racist police” (Schwartz 2020:281). Since white Americans tend to be treated with “exceptional kindness and empathy”, those citizens “try not to criticize the police no matter what [they] have done” (Iheme 2020:239). White Americans are generalized to see killings committed by the police as linked to self-defense (Iheme 2020).

University presidents have a substantial amount of access to channels of communication. When they choose to address their stakeholders about difficult and divisive topics, it is crucial to examine those texts for the discursive strategies which are used to maintain present power structures (Garcia et al, 2021). After the murder of George Floyd, the presidents and chancellors of the SEC wrote about their feelings and even discussed their desire for change but did not use those statements as an opportunity to speak about the disparate reality of African Americans in the United States, especially in regard to the way this group is disproportionately terrorized and

murdered by the police (Schwartz 2020). They do not talk about the racism as an issue that is related to their constituencies but as something happening in the world and not linked to the behaviors or world views of their stakeholders (Ahmed 2012). These stakeholders are categorized as a “family,” a metaphor used to unite them in action and define them as having specific traits, characteristics, and values. This grouping removes the differences among the individual members of the “family” and covers up the various ways they see and experience the world. The SEC presidents and chancellors, are authority figures with great power but position themselves as equals with their subordinate constituents, contradicting the power imbalance between themselves and their students, faculty, and staff. While they use modal verbs like “can,” “will,” and “must” to talk about their commitment to change and their desire to compel their stakeholders to action, they leave out the steps and strategies that are necessary to meet those objectives. “Commitment needs to be explained, even when a commitment has been made” (Ahmed 2012). Rather than providing their constituents with tangible, measurable goals that would facilitate actual change for African Americans who deal with racist and life-threatening structures, the SEC leaders released statements full of abstraction, omitting the concrete details necessary to produce true accountability. The presidents and chancellors hide and even omit entirely the negative actions of the police. Some even extend this discursive strategy of exclusion by choosing to omit George Floyd from their discourse altogether. Their status as elites, as well as their motivation to maintain a positive relationship with stakeholders who provide financial security to their institutions, is evident in their unwillingness to be transparent about the police and their actions.

It does not matter if you write eighty words or eight hundred if you will not write the simple sentence that illuminates the truth. A police officer murdered George Floyd. The SEC university

presidents and chancellors are desirous of the money that Black and Brown students can provide but hesitate to talk about the systems and structures that do them harm. They are more respectful towards an institution, the police, that perpetuates murder, than to the victim of the crime, George Floyd. Statements like the ones made by the SEC university presidents and chancellors should not be viewed as a step towards antiracism but rather should be a reminder that Black people, in life and in death, are held in such little regard, that people in power will seek to cover the transgressions of their murderers rather than tell the truth and potentially upend the structures and systems that provide and sustain the status and security of elites (Ahmed 2012, Cole and Harper 2017).

## REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.
- Alfred, Richard and Scott Rosevear. 2000. "Organizational Structure, Management, and Leadership for the Future." Pp 1-28 in *Managing Colleges and Universities: Issues for Leadership*, edited by Allan M. Hoffman and Randal W. Summers. Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey.
- Anderson, James D., and Christopher M. Span. 2016. "History of Education in the News: The Legacy of Slavery, Racism, and Contemporary Black Activism on Campus." *History of Education Quarterly* 56(4):646-56.
- Andrade, Luis M., and Carol A. Lundberg. 2022. "Benevolent Intentions, Dangerous Ideologies: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Presidents' Letters after the Threat of the Repeal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 15(2):254–266. Retrieved February 22, 2022 ( <https://www-proquest-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/docview/2405347079/fulltextPDF/A908232825A546EFPQ/>).
- Bakan, Joel. 2004. *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*. New York: Free Press.
- Baker, Paul, and Sibonile Ellece. 2011. *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis*. New York, N.Y: Continuum International Publishing Group. Retrieved February 27, 2022 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=634551>)
- Ballotpedia. 2022. "State Government Trifectas." Retrieved February 14, 2022 ([https://ballotpedia.org/State\\_government\\_trifectas](https://ballotpedia.org/State_government_trifectas)).

- Barkan, Steven E, and Steven F Cohn. 1998. "Racial Prejudice and Support by Whites for Police Use of Force: A Research Note." *Justice Quarterly* 15(4): 743-753. Retrieved on May 2, 2021 ([https://heinonline-org.proxy.lib.utk.edu/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/jquart15&id=756&men\\_tab=srchresults](https://heinonline-org.proxy.lib.utk.edu/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/jquart15&id=756&men_tab=srchresults)).
- Barrow, Clyde W. 1990. *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894-1928*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bell, Joyce M. and Douglas Hartmann. 2007. "Diversity in Everyday Discourse: The Cultural Ambiguities and Consequences of 'Happy Talk'." *American Sociological Review* 72(6): 895-914.
- Bender, Barbara, and Susan E. Lawrence. 2021. "College and University Mission and Stakeholders: Purposes, Perspectives, Pressure." Pp. 44–64 in *A Guide for Leaders in Higher Education: Core Concepts, Competencies, and Tools*. edited by B.D. Ruben, R. De Lisi, and R. A. Gigliotti. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. Retrieved March 20, 2022 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/reader.action?docID=6714072&ppg=68>).
- Bloor, Meriel, and Thomas Bloor. 2007. *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*. 1st ed. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Byrd, W. Carson, Rachele J. Brunn-Bevel, and Sarah M. Ovink, eds. 2019. *Intersectionality and Higher Education: Identity and Inequality on College Campuses*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.



- Cabrera, Nolan León. 2014. "Exposing Whiteness in Higher Education: White Male College Students Minimizing Racism, Claiming Victimization, and Recreating White Supremacy." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 17(1):30-55.
- Chaney, Cassandra and Ray V Robertson. 2013. "Racism and Police Brutality in America." *Journal of African American Studies* 17(4):480-505.
- Cole, Eddie R., and Shaun R. Harper. 2017. "Race and Rhetoric: An Analysis of College Presidents' Statements on Campus Racial Incidents." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 10(4):318-333.
- Coombs, W. Timothy. 2020. "Being Tone-Deaf through Silence." *Crisis Communication Blog* by Timothy Coombs. Retrieved February 22, 2022 (<https://coombscrisiscommunication.wordpress.com/2020/06/27/being-tone-deaf-through-silence/>).
- Davies, Bronwyn, and Rom Harré. 1990. "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20(1):43–63. Retrieved April 2 (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x>).
- Davis, Shametrice, and Jessica Harris. 2016. "But We Didn't Mean It Like That: Critical Race Analysis of Campus Responses to Racial Incidents." *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs* 2(1):62–78. Retrieved February 22, 2022 (<https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=jcshesa>).
- Diers-Lawson, Audra. 2019. *Crisis Communication: Managing Stakeholder Relationships*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

- Duderstadt, James J. 2000a. *A University for the 21st Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Duderstadt, James J. 2003. *Intercollegiate Athletics and the American University: A University President's Perspective*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Duderstadt, James J. 2007. *The View from the Helm: Leading the American University during an Era of Change*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Eichar, Douglas M. 2015. *The Rise and Fall of Corporate Social Responsibility*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- Elving, Wim J.L. 2013. "Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility in a Skeptical World." Pp 57-69 in *Contemporary Issues in Corporate Social Responsibility*, edited by Duygu Turker, Huriye Toker, and Ceren Altuntas. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. Retrieved November 5, 2021 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/reader.action?docID=1609356>).
- Engell, James, and Anthony Dangerfield. 2005. *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Evans, Stephanie Y. 2016. *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London; New York: Longman.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1996. "A Reply to Henry Widdowson's 'Discourse Analysis: A Critical View.'" *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics* 5(1):49–56. Retrieved March 22, 2022 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/096394709600500105>).

- Fairclough, Norman. 2000. *New Labour, New Language?* New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2013. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Abington, Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Furco, Andrew. 2010. "The Engaged Campus: Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Public Engagement." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 58(4):375–90. Retrieved February 20, 2022 (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00071005.2010.527656?needAccess=true>).
- Garcia, Crystal E., Benjamin Arnberg, Jessica Weise, and Marit Winborn. 2020. "Institutional Responses to Events Challenging Campus Climates: Examining the Power in Language." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 13(4):345–54. Retrieved February 22, 2020 (<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2249962462/fulltextPDF/5D8DCD9A86314506PQ/1?accountid=14766>).
- Gardner, Susan K., Jeni Hart, Jennifer Ng, Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, Kelly Ward, and Lisa Wolf-Wendel. 2017. "'Me-Search': Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Subjectivity in Knowledge Construction." *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* 8(2):88–108. Retrieved March 4, 2022 (<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/SGPE-D-17-00014/full/html>).
- Gearhart, G. David, and Michael T. Miller. "The College President and Fundraising: Perspectives on the Responsibilities and Challenges of Fundraising." Pp. 210-235 in *Handbook of Research on the Changing Role of College and University Leadership*, edited by Michael T. Miller and G. David Gearhart. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

- Gee, James Paul, and Michael Handford, eds. 2012. *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. London; New York: Routledge. Retrieved April 16, 2022 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=957494>).
- Gigliotti, Ralph A. 2019. *Crisis Leadership in Higher Education: Theory and Practice*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Grawe, Nathan D. 2018. *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Grawe, Nathan D. 2021. “How to Survive the Enrollment Bust,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved April 1, 2022 (<https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-navigate-the-demographic-cliff>).
- Greene, Francis Paul. 2003. “I Ain’t Got No Body: The Moral Uncertainty of Bodiless Murder Jurisprudence in New York after People V. Bierenbaum.” *Fordham Law Review* 71(6): 2863–2906. Retrieved March 9, 2022 (<https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3917&context=flr>).
- Gross, Neil. 2013. *Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hackett, Edward J. 2014. “Academic Capitalism.” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 39(5):635–38. Retrieved February 19, 2022 (<https://journals-sagepub-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/doi/10.1177/0162243914540219>).
- Hanley, Larry. 2005. “Academic Capitalism in the New University.” *The Radical Teacher* 73: 3-7. Retrieved April 22, 2021 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20710307>).

- Heller, Henry. 2016. *The Capitalist University: The Transformations of Higher Education in the United States (1945-2016)*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hypolite, Liane I., and Ashley M. Stewart. 2021. "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Institutional Responses to the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 14(1):1–11. Retrieved February 22, 2022 (<https://www-proquest-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/docview/2325002976/fulltextPDF/1D68C6C85A0346E9PQ/>).
- Iheme, Williams C. 2020. Systemic Racism, Police Brutality of Black People, and the Use of Violence in Quelling Peaceful Protests in America. *The Age of Human Rights Journal* 15:224-262.
- Jablonkai, Reka. 2013. "Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility." Pp 143-161 in *Contemporary Issues in Corporate Social Responsibility*, edited by Duygu Turker, Huriye Toker, and Ceren Altuntas. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. Retrieved November 5, 2021 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/reader.action?docID=1609356>).
- Johnson, Benjamin Heber, Patrick Kavanagh, and Kevin Mattson, eds. 2003. *Steal This University: The Rise of the Corporate University and the Academic Labor Movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Kirp, David L. 2003. *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lawrence, Francis L. 2006. *Leadership in Higher Education: Views from the Presidency*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Loftin, R. Bowen. 2018. "Leading a Public Flagship with a State System." Pp. 245–52 in *Leading Colleges and Universities: Lessons from Higher Education Leaders*, edited by S.

- J. Trachtenberg, G. B. Kauvar, and E. G. Gee. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Logan, Nneka. 2021. "A Theory of Corporate Responsibility to Race (CRR): Communication and Racial Justice in Public Relations." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 33(1):6-22.
- Maak, Thomas, Nicola M. Pless, Marc Orlitzky, and Sukhbir Sandhu. 2021. *The Routledge Companion to Corporate Social Responsibility*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge.
- Machin, David and Andrea Mayr. 2012. *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Martin, Jason M., and Stephanie K. Van Stee. 2020. "Racism Lives Here: The University of Missouri's Response to a Campus Crisis." *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 28(4):224-40.
- McManus, Hannah D, Francis T Cullen, Cheryl Lero Jonson, Alexander L. Burton, and Velmer S. Burton. 2019. "Will Black Lives Matter to the Police? African Americans' Concerns About Trump's Presidency." *Victims & Offenders* 14(8): 1040-1062.
- Miliband, Ralph. 1969. *The State in Capitalist Society*. New York: Basic Books. Retrieved November 30, 2020 (<https://libcom.org/files/the-state-in-capitalist-society.pdf>).
- Moerschell, Linda, and Susan S. Novak. 2020. "Managing Crisis in a University Setting: The Challenge of Alignment." *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 28(1): 30-40.
- Nelson, Stephen James. 2014. *College Presidents Reflect: Life in and out of the Ivory Tower*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Retrieved February 18, 2022 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/reader.action?docID=1589263>).

- New York Times. 2016. "2016 Presidential Election Results." *New York Times*. Retrieved May 1, 2021 (<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president>).
- New York Times. 2021. "Derek Chauvin Trial: Chauvin Found Guilty of Murdering George Floyd." *New York Times*. Retrieved on May 1, 2021 (<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/04/20/us/derek-chauvin-verdict-george-floyd>).
- Parker, Kim, and Ruth Igielnik. 2020. "What We Know About Gen Z So Far." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. Retrieved March 18, 2022 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>).
- Ragland, Alex. 2021. "A Review of 'To Protect and Serve.'" *Georgetown University Undergraduate Law Review*. Retrieved March 6, 2022 (<https://guulr.com/2021/05/10/a-review-of-to-protect-and-serve/>).
- Rankin, Susan R., and Robert Dean Reason. 2005. "Differing Perceptions: How Students of Color and White Students Perceive Campus Climate for Underrepresented Groups." *Journal of College Student Development* 46(1):43-61.
- Rice, Laurie L., and Kenneth W. Moffett. 2022. *The Political Voices of Generation Z*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ruben, Brent D., Richard De Lisi, and Ralph A. Gigliotti. 2021. *A Guide for Leaders in Higher Education: Core Concepts, Competencies, and Tools*. 2nd ed. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing. Retrieved March 20, 2022 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=6714072>).

- Schrecker, Ellen. 2010. *The Lost Soul of Higher Education: Corporatization, the Assault of Academic Freedom, and the End of the American University*. New York: The New Press.
- Schwartz, Stephan A. 2020. "Police Brutality and Racism in America." *Explore (New York, N.Y.)* 16(5):280-282.
- Slaughter, Sheila, and Larry L. Leslie. 2001. "Expanding and Elaborating the Concept of Academic Capitalism." *Organization* 8(2):154-61.
- Smedley, Audrey. 2007. *Race in North America Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. 3rd ed. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press. Retrieved on April 20, 2021 ([https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cbibliographic\\_details%7C1677525](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C1677525)).
- Stearns, Peter N. 2016. *Guiding the American University: Contemporary Challenges and Choices*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Stephenson, Nathaniel W. 2012. *The Day of the Confederacy: The Chronicle of the Embattled South*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Luton, Bedford: Andrews UK. Retrieved on April 30, 2021 (<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.utk.edu/lib/utk/reader.action?docID=4460746>).
- Stripling, Jack. 2021. "As Race Looms Large, College Trustees Remain Mostly White." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved February 14, 2022 (<https://www-chronicle-com.utk.idm.oclc.org/article/as-race-looms-large-college-trustees-remain-mostly-white>).
- Squire, Dian, Z. Nicolazzo, and Rosemary J. Perez. 2019. "Institutional Response as Non-Performative: What University Communications (Don't) Say About Movements Toward Justice." *The Review of Higher Education* 42(5):109-33.



- Swanson, Ryan. 2015. "Establishing Proper 'Athletic Relations': The Nascent SEC and the Formation of College Athletic Conferences." *Alabama Review* 68(2):168–88.
- Tachokova, Elina R., and W. Timothy Coombs. 2022. *Communicating in Extreme Crises: Lessons from the Edge*. New York: Routledge. Retrieved February 21, 2022 (<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003094661/communicating-extreme-crises-elina-tachkova-timothy-coombs>).
- Turker, Duygu, Huriye Toker, and Ceren Altuntas eds. 2013. *Contemporary Issues in Corporate Social Responsibility*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. Retrieved November 5, 2021 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/reader.action?docID=1609356>).
- Undergraduate Programs. 2020. "College vs. University: What Is the Difference?" *Elmhurst University*. Retrieved April 15, 2022 (<https://www.elmhurst.edu/blog/college-vs-university/>).
- Updegrove, Alexander H., Maisha N. Cooper, Erin A. Orrick, and Alex R. Piquero. 2020. "Red States and Black Lives: Applying the Racial Threat Hypothesis to the Black Lives Matter Movement." *Justice Quarterly* 37(1):85-108.
- U.S. Department of Education. 2021 College Scorecard. Retrieved May 1, 2021 (<https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/compare/>).
- van Dijk, Teun. 1993. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse & Society* 4(2): 249-283.
- van Dijk, Teun A. 1995. "Discourse, Power and Access." Pp. 84–104 in *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, edited by C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and M. Coulthard. London; New York: Routledge.

- van Dijk, Teun. 2008. "Critical Discourse Analysis and Nominalization: Problem or Pseudo-problem?" *Discourse & Society* 19(6):821-828. Retrieved May 1, 2021 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42889234>).
- van Leeuwen, Theo. 2008. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Van Leeuwen, Theo. 2009. "Critical Discourse Analysis." Pp 277-292 in *Discourse, of Course: An Overview of Research in Discourse Studies*, edited by Jan Renkema. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company. Retrieved March 4, 2022 (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=622482>).
- Walsh, Christopher J. 2006. *Where Football Is King: A History of the SEC*. First Taylor Trade Publishing edition. Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing.
- Wilder, Craig S. 2013. *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.
- White, Khadijah. 2016. "Black Lives on Campuses Matter: Reflecting on the Rise of the New Black Student Movement." *Soundings* 63(63):86-97.
- Zheng, Lily. 2020. "We're Entering the Age of Corporate Social Justice." *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved November 4, 2021 (<https://hbr.org/2020/06/were-entering-the-age-of-corporate-social-justice>).

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

In the case of many public colleges and universities in the United States, they are members of a larger system. A system is two or more schools that have their own nationally recognized accreditations and a single governing board which controls all the schools within that system (Loftin 2018). When a university is part of system, the highest executive at that institution is called the chancellor and they answer to a president who the chief operating officer of the system (Duderstadt 2007, Loftin 2018). This is the case at the University of Alabama, University of Tennessee, Texas A&M University and the University of Arkansas. Vanderbilt University is a private institution and the highest leader is the chancellor, but they are not part of a larger network of schools. In Georgia, all the public institutions of higher education as unified under a single system with its head being a chancellor and the University of Georgia's leader is a president. This is also true for the University of Florida. The University of Mississippi and Mississippi University are also housed under a similar system, with the system being led by a board of trustee that is advised by a commissioner and the leaders at the individual campuses named chancellor and president, respectively. The leader of the University of Kentucky is called president. At the time these statements were released, the leader at the University of Missouri was both president of the University of Missouri system and interim chancellor of the University of Missouri campus. In the cases of Auburn University, Louisiana State University and the University of South Carolina, the president is both the head of the system and the president of the system's flagship university.

## Appendix B

### SEC University President Statements

- Bell, Stuart R. 2020. "UA Community Response to Recent Tragedies." *University of Alabama News*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://news.ua.edu/2020/05/message-from-the-president-ua-community-response-to-recent-tragedies/>).
- Boyce, Glenn. 2020. "A Message on Recent National Events." *Office of the Chancellor*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://chancellor.olemiss.edu/a-message-on-recent-national-events/>).
- Capilouto, Eli. 2020. "Breonna Taylor, Our Community and Our Next Steps." *UKnow*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://uknow.uky.edu/campus-news/breonna-taylor-our-community-and-our-next-steps/>).
- Caslen, Robert. 2020. "A Message from President Bob Caslen." *Presidential Communications University of South Carolina*. Retrieved March 11, 2021 ([https://sc.edu/about/our\\_leadership/president/presidential\\_communications/message\\_bob\\_caslen\\_bias\\_reporting.php](https://sc.edu/about/our_leadership/president/presidential_communications/message_bob_caslen_bias_reporting.php)).
- Choi, Mun Y. 2020. "June 1, 2020: Combatting Discrimination and Racism." *Office of the President*. Retrieved March 2, 2021 (<https://president.missouri.edu/messages/june-1-2020-combatting-discrimination-and-racism/>).
- Fuchs, Kent. 2020. "Let's End Racism and Violence Directed at African Americans: A Video Request to the Gator Nation Following the Killing of George Floyd." *Statement University of Florida*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUopSFGc93I>).

- Galligan, Thomas C.. 2020. "A Message from @LSUpresident." Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/LSU/status/1266504630332264452>).
- Gogue, Jay. 2020a. *Auburn University*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 from <https://m.facebook.com/auburnu/posts/10158302172368194>.
- Gogue, Jay. 2020b. "A Message from Dr. Jay Gogue." Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/AuburnU/status/1269026269976502273>).
- Keenum, Mark. 2020. "A Message from MSU President Mark Keenum." Retrieved March 2, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/msstate/status/1267176380061618182>).
- Morehead, Jere W. 2020a. "A Message from President Morehead." Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/universityofga/status/1267145099068297218>).
- Morehead, Jere W. 2020b. "Message from President Jere W. Morehead to the UGA Community." Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/universityofga/status/1267556023902052354>).
- Plowman, Donde. 2020. "His Name Is George Floyd." *Office of the Chancellor*. Retrieved April 30, 2021 (<https://chancellor.utk.edu/2020/05/30/his-name-is-george-floyd/>).
- Steinmetz, Joseph E. 2020. "Everyone Has a Role to Play." *The Office of the Chancellor University of Arkansas*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://chancellor.uark.edu/key-communications/everyone-has-a-role.php>).
- Young, Michael K. 2020 "A Message to Our Aggie Community." *Office of the President Texas A&M University*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://president.tamu.edu/messages/a-message-to-our-aggie-community.html>).

Wente, Susan R. 2020. "Vanderbilt Statement on Racial Injustice in Our Society." *Vanderbilt University News*. Retrieved March 1, 2021 (<https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2020/05/31/wente-0531-racial-injustice/>).

## **Appendix C**

### **University of South Carolina President Statement**

President Robert L. Caslen resigned from his position at the University of South Carolina on May 12, 2021. His statement has been removed from the President Communications page on the University of South Carolina website. A copy of the webpage is included here.

# A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BOB CASLEN

May 31, 2020

With heavy hearts, we mourn the horrific killing of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer while three other officers stood by in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Our thoughts go out to Floyd's family and to the families of all those who have been the victims of violent murders fueled by racism and hatred in our country. These events are a stark reminder of the dark divisions that continue to run through our society, the legacy of a dark past that we have not yet fully reconciled. We must acknowledge these divisions and commit to becoming a more just and equitable society.

We stand in solidarity with the African American community, as these events have only compounded the sense of grief, fear, and loss brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here as well, we are reminded of the systemic biases that shape our realities. It is our collective responsibility to challenge these institutional inequities and to demand better for ourselves and for future generations.

As Gamecocks, let us be leaders in these efforts. Our Carolinian Creed calls on us to *respect the dignity of all persons, to respect the rights and property of others, to discourage bigotry, while striving to learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions*. Violence and hateful rhetoric are not reflective of these values. If we are to begin the process of healing the wounds of racism, hate and bigotry that have brought us to this current tipping point, we must engage one another in thoughtful dialogue about our individual and collective experiences. We must do the work of educating ourselves about the harmful impact of racism and discrimination in all of its manifestations.

Anti-discrimination and anti-harassment training are currently provided to UofSC faculty and staff and required of all students who are new to the Columbia campus. And multiple units are engaged in advancing diversity and inclusion initiatives across our campus. However, given this pivotal moment in which we find ourselves, we will intensify these efforts to ensure that we are equipping our students, faculty and staff with the tools needed to effectively navigate the current tensions in our society. To this end, we are assembling a team to work on the implementation of a new

[https://sc.edu/about/our\\_leadership/president/presidential\\_communications/message\\_bob\\_caslen\\_bias\\_reporting.php](https://sc.edu/about/our_leadership/president/presidential_communications/message_bob_caslen_bias_reporting.php)

Figure 1: Image of Bob Caslen's Message



diversity module that will be required of all UofSC freshmen as part of their orientation process beginning in the 2020-2021 academic year. And we will amplify the training available to all students, faculty and staff to ensure that we have the resources needed to foster a campus culture that is reflective of our Creed.

In his 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. acknowledged the "interrelatedness of all communities and states," noting that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." Let us turn our anger into action, demanding justice where there is injustice, peace where there is violence, and love where there is hate. Let the suffocation of this moment be the impetus for change.

Campus Resources:

To report incidents of bias or hate, submit a [Bias and Hate Incident Form](http://web.archive.org/web/20210102210405/https://publicdocs.maxient.com/reportingform.php UnivofSouthCarolinaEOP&layout_id=2) ([http://web.archive.org/web/20210102210405/https://publicdocs.maxient.com/reportingform.php UnivofSouthCarolinaEOP&layout\\_id=2](http://web.archive.org/web/20210102210405/https://publicdocs.maxient.com/reportingform.php UnivofSouthCarolinaEOP&layout_id=2))

UofSC Counseling & Psychiatry: 803-777-5223

UofSC Police Department: 803-777-4215

Tracey L. Weldon  
Interim Chief Diversity Officer, Office of the Provost  
Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Bob Caslen  
President

## VITA

Alexandria Brown was born in 1985. She decided not to go to graduate school right out of undergraduate, like a dummy. She eventually got pregnant and married and decided this would be the perfect time to go back to school. She had taken a job in the Tickle College of Engineering and that job, along with the general state of race, gender, and socioeconomic disparity in the United States eventually lead Ms. Brown to apply to the Sociology Master's program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her research interests have been very broad but are often related to topics being covered in the daily news cycle or that are related to her position in academia, including anti-Asian racism during Covid-19, the murder of George Floyd, academic capitalism, and the experience of Black women faculty. Alexandria hopes stay in academia in an administrative capacity and support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at the University of Tennessee.