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## On the Use of Past and Present Values in the Marketing of Butler University

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**On the Use of Past and Present Values in the Marketing of Butler University**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Strategic Communication

College of Communication

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Butler University of Indianapolis, Indiana is a liberal arts college of approximately 4,600 undergraduate students (U.S. News, 2020, “Butler University” page). It has a longstanding reputation in the region as an academically challenging university, as well as a more recent claim to fame in the college basketball arena. Butler University is currently the highest-ranking regional Midwest university (U.S. News, 2020, “Best Regional Universities Midwest Rankings” page). Its competitors in the realm of prospective students and on the basketball court include other similar institutions that are also in the Big East Conference of college athletics, such as Creighton University, Marquette University, and Xavier University. Other Indiana schools—to include Indiana University and Purdue University—also serve as competitors for gaining new students. Communication tactics and brand image for all of these universities differ, as there are aspects of each which make them unique in their own right. However, Butler University has one unique card to play which is undervalued in current branding efforts.

Branding is used by companies, celebrities, public figures, sports teams, and even universities to help distinguish a product, service, or individual in the eyes of the consumer. Universities, in particular, can utilize a brand image in order to maintain credibility and sense of loyalty amongst audiences such as university alumni, current students, faculty, and prospective students. A university brand can be made up of many tangible and intangible components. Some examples might include a university logo, mascot, fight song, colors, text font, mission statement, slogan, sports teams, notable alumni, and more. The specifics and the sum of these elements are, of course, unique to each university. For example, some schools choose to emphasize elements of their histories in their brand. Ivy League colleges such as Harvard

University can be considered “high-heritage” universities, as their brands rely on a consumer perception of traditional excellence (Rose, Rose, & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). Research has been conducted to determine if universities outside of the Ivy League might also benefit from emphasizing their university heritage (Idris & Whitfield, 2014, p. 42; Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). In some contexts, depending on the university’s unique brand and circumstances, it might be beneficial to utilize history to supplement other marketing and communication efforts.

The following body of research is a case study analyzing the founding values of what is today Butler University and comparing this founding to values promoted in the university’s modern marketing communications. The research includes a literature review which examines the basics of branding and how branding has been applied to today’s realm of secondary education. Also included is an explanation and justification of the use of the research case study method in conducting this research. The findings explore the life of Butler University’s primary founder, Ovid Butler, and the events which led him to believe so passionately in the construction of what was known at the time of its founding as North Western Christian University (NWCU). Findings also include a brief overview of the school’s operations between its opening in 1855 and modern day before diving into examples of contemporary marketing communications. Based on the information compiled in this research, it is apparent that Butler University has a long history of being ahead of the curve. The university was founded by an adamant abolitionist whose wish it was to provide a high standard of education to all who were willing to work at achieving academic success, to include female students and students of color. However, this triumphant past is often lost or forgotten in the university’s modern brand image which portrays a youthful and future-focused university. At the conclusion of this project, the data suggests that

Butler University is passing up a valuable opportunity to connect Ovid Butler's driven, forward-thinking vision with the university's current brand. A thoughtful and intentional integration of Butler University's past into present-day marketing communications could help the university further distinguish itself amongst fierce competition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Branding

Branding is a tool used to help an entity—product, service, company, sports team, celebrity, etc.—become recognizable and gain credibility with a consumer audience (Gillespie & Hennessey, 2016, p. 347). Branding can include a name, logo or other visuals, mascots, catchy jingles, and more. However, there are also other elements to branding which are not so tangible; “Invisible branding refers to stakeholder touch-points that have little or no visual presence in the market, but still deliver what the brand promises” (Levine, 2009, p. 33). For example, public relations efforts or a company's business model could be considered elements of this invisible branding. All of these visible and invisible pieces come together to help consumers form a perception about the entity behind a brand. This perception can be made up of different attitudes audiences hold towards the brand, affected by emotional reactions to marketing communications, corporate social responsibility efforts, personal biases, etc. When brands are competing with one another to be perceived in the most positive light, they are dealing in brand equity. Described as “a combination of strength and awareness,” brand equity uses public perception to place value on the entity in question (Darlow, 2014, p. 17). Strength, in this context, refers to what sort of assumptions consumers believe about a specific brand. In turn, awareness refers to how often consumers think about a specific brand (Darlow, 2014, p. 17). This strength and awareness

combined can have a positive effect on the level of involvement a consumer feels towards a particular brand, thus contributing to brand loyalty.

According to some estimates, the average adult in the United States is exposed to upwards of 4,000 advertising messages each day (Simpson, 2017). They appear on cell phone screens, billboards, radio airwaves, and public transportation, yet not all of them make meaningful impact. As branding strategies have evolved through years of oversaturation, marketers have faced challenges attempting to differentiate their client from the competition. One common strategy used to achieve differentiation is the use of brand positioning. In this context, positioning has been described as “an organized system for finding a window in the mind. It is based on the concept that that communication can only take place at the right time and under the right circumstances” (Ries & Trout, 2000, p. 21). In other words, a brand utilizing a positioning strategy is striving to find a niche role amongst its competitors and occupy that role in the audience’s mind. This positioning is often wrapped up in what is called a positioning statement. “Conventionally, the positioning statement is the heart of the brand strategy” (Holt, 2004, p. 63). Though effective in some situations, positioning strategy alone does not always meet the goals of a business. Some research has argued that positioning statements can lead brands to focus only on trivial matters which will not sustain the brand in the long run (Holt, 2004, pp. 59-60). In order to combat this, some brands have mastered the use of cultural innovation (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 8).

Prompted by disruptions in cultural conventions, cultural innovations respond to emergent opportunities “specific to a historical moment and a particular group of people” (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 12). An example of an emergent opportunity might be a shift in a nation’s racial tensions or job stability. This strategy provides a meaningful way to cut through the clutter

of other brands. Nike is an example of a brand with a track record of using cultural strategy well. Cultural strategy is a method of executing cultural branding, which “applies particularly to categories in which people tend to value products as a means of self-expression” and also “other marketed entities that people rely on to express their identity” (Holt, 2004, p. 5). For example, dramatizing the life experiences of sports idols such as Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley for the purposes of early Just Do It campaigns allowed Nike to take the American ghetto and “systematically exploit its cultural codes in subsequent advertising” (Holt & Cameron, 2010, p. 37). However, industry giants like Nike are not the only brands that test new methods to stand out against rising competition. Additionally, companies which sell a tangible product are not the only brands trying to get a spot in those thousands of promotional messages viewed by the American consumer.

### **Branding a University**

Universities also have a brand image which they can use to promote themselves to different audiences, to include prospective students. As has been noted by previous researchers, the process a prospective student endures when selecting a college has evolved greatly over the past 30 or so years (Bunzel, 2007, p. 152). Today’s universities have shifted their priorities in order to compete for the tuition dollars of the best students via aggressive branding tactics which make them feel less like schools and more like businesses (Bunzel, 2007, p. 152). While the jury is still out on whether or not university branding practices have any real effect on student registration, retention rate, school rankings, etc., the trend of universities advertising themselves just as any corporate brand is pervasive (Bunzel, 2007, p. 152, Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014, p. 156). One method of building a differentiated university brand is to utilize university brand heritage.

Some of the most prestigious American universities may benefit from a positive perception with the general public due to their longstanding history and name recognition, such as those associated with Ivy League status. One study found that two “high-heritage” universities (Harvard University and Stanford University) carried positive student perceptions in categories to include “quality and prestige related to a university’s history” and “its track record of delivering value” (Rose, Rose, & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). Displaying proud tradition is an important part of these schools’ branding efforts. Research has been conducted to determine if other, lesser-known universities might benefit from trying to evoke a nostalgia similar to the Ivy League competition (Idris & Whitfield, 2014, p. 42). Efforts to do so often strive to establish a university’s brand heritage, defined as “utilizing the university’s history, symbols, legacies, and traditions to reinforce and invoke the university’s essence within a contemporary context” (Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). However, it has been found that relying on brand heritage alone is most likely not enough to create a truly strong and successful brand in modern times (Idris & Whitfield, 2014, pp. 54-55, Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 347). While it is a beneficial practice, it should be interwoven with other elements in order to be most effective. In order to best utilize brand heritage, it is first important to understand its components when in the context of a university.

A series of focus groups examining elements contributing to an institution’s heritage—including university stature, university symbols, and university sports legacy—found that students repeatedly mentioned the value of the university’s history and reputation (Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). Researchers tested these three elements with two experiments. Results showed that “students responded more favorably to an advertisement in which the university invoked its heritage than when it did not” (Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 347). Furthermore,



the research revealed that leaning on history alone may not persuade the parents of prospective students; therefore, it is important to supplement a university's history with positive links to modern-day operations (Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 347). The idea is to leverage an institution's past into a prestigious present.

In order to convey their brand to the public, today's universities use a number of different communication media. Similar to any other business, one can observe television advertisements, billboards, free swag, and other pieces of marketing memorabilia of almost any university operating in their area, all directed at establishing a positive perception of that particular institution. An important ingredient to establishing a strong university brand is the development of a good corporate visual identity (CVI) (Idris & Whitfield, 2014, p. 42). Brand logos, colors, fonts, etc. can be used as tools to help a university build its brand image, to include that of a brand which utilizes its university's brand heritage. One study found that when provided the choice between a traditional logo and one with a more modern aesthetic, students were more likely to have a positive perception of the university with the traditional logo (Idris & Whitfield, 2014, p. 53). This supports other research which indicates that universities with successful histories which can be linked to or observed in the modern era may receive positive and impactful responses from prospective students (Rose, Rose & Merchant, 2017, p. 347). A cohesive university brand which is able to link its past with its present in such a way as to increase the perception of the success of current and prospective students is one way to find success in today's marketplace.

## **METHODS**

To explore the study's research questions, the case study method was deemed most appropriate. A research case study can be defined as an inquiry which seeks to investigate a

contemporary case and does so utilizing a methodological process to add value to current theory (Yin, 2018, p. 15). In this circumstance, the contemporary case at hand is that of Butler University and its current brand when compared to the institution's founding. The research questions posed about the case are as follows:

- RQ1: What were the founding principles of Northwestern Christian University and how did they shape the institution Butler University is today?
- RQ2: How do the founding values of Northwestern Christian University compare to the values that the modern Butler University portrays in its branded promotional materials?

In order to best respond to these research questions, historical research related to Ovid Butler and the university he founded was collected to establish a knowledge of Butler University's origins. Documents included alumni publications, newspapers, and family biographies from the Butler University Archives, as well as books such as *Affectionately Yours: The Civil War Home Front Letters of the Ovid Butler Family*. Further work was then done to collect examples of Butler University's modern brand image via the official website and current marketing campaigns. Examples of current Butler University communications examined include the Unleashed marketing campaign and 2020 Founder's Week materials.

This particular project took the form of a single-case study, meaning that context was provided, and one case was researched. The rationale for conducting a single-case study to compare and contrast the founding of NWCU and modern Butler University falls under the longitudinal rationale, "studying the same single-case at two or more different points in time" (Yin, 2018, p. 51). The longitudinal single-case study can be used study one case over an elongated period of time (Yin, 2018, p. 51), which is what occurs in this project as findings span from the 1800s to modern day. Evidence used in this case study fall under the six sources of

evidence provided by Yin and include: documentation such as diaries and news clippings, archival records such as organizational records, and direct observation (2018, p. 113). Due to the method of continually collecting evidence as new relevance is realized, the case study is adaptive in nature. “The skilled researcher must remember the original purpose of the case study but then must be willing to adapt procedures or plans if unanticipated events occur” (Yin, 2018, p. 84). This adaptivity is especially prominent in the time-series technique of analyzing case study evidence.

Time-series analysis can be used to answer a “how” or “why” question about the relationship of events over time such as the research questions previously listed. Specifically, evidence is analyzed in a chronological sequence, taking advantage of the major strength of case studies, the ability to study one phenomenon over time (Yin, 2018, p. 184). Yin states that the chronological time-series technique can be more insightful than other time-series approaches because it can cover many different types of events (2018, p. 185). The timeline covered in project at hand spans many different events, from the events leading to the founding of NWCUC in 1855 to modern occurrences. Therefore, it is beneficial to observed and analyze in a chronological fashion, pulling in more sources as they become relevant.

The sources chosen for this project were selected primarily for one of two reasons. The sources which provided historical context were selected due to the insight they provided into Ovid Butler’s life and the founding of the university. Whenever possible, writings from Ovid Butler himself or those who knew his family were used in order to stay as true as possible to original source material. For the modern analysis, examples such as the Unleashed campaign from Butler University proved to be the most recent marketing communications issued from the university to external publics at the time research was being conducted. The 2020 Founder’s

Week materials were analyzed because they were also the most recent examples at the time of this research. There was also an element of convenience sampling which played into the research due to accessibility. While using a convenience sample can limit the insights eventually drawn, it also allowed this case study to continue its iterative process. Though not exhaustive, below is an example of many of the sources referenced for the completion of this research (Table 1).

Source Title	Type	Location	Year
butler.edu Homepage	webpage	butler.edu	2020
Butler University Founder's Week Page	webpage	butler.edu/founders-day	2020
BU Founder's Week 2020 T-shirt	photo	personal item	2020
BU Founder's Week 2020 Insta. Post 1	photo	Instagram	2020
BU Founder's Week 2020 Insta. Post 2	photo	Instagram	2020
BU Founder's Week 2020 Schedule	webpage	butler.edu/founders-week/2020-events	2020
Butler Stories: Bulldogs Unleashed	website	stories.butler.edu/unleashed	2019
Unleashed television advertisement	video	Youtube	2019
NWCU Charter		archives; digital download	1850
The Union Title News: Ovid Butler	periodical	archives; photo	1947
Ovid Butler and Butler University	"compiled from records of the university"	archives; photo	1944
Butler Alumna Quarterly: Ovid Butler	periodical	archives; photo	1923
Butler Alumna Quarterly: The First Founder's Day	periodical	archives; photo	1925
Butler Alumna Quarterly: Founder's Day	periodical	archives; photo	1916
National Cyclopaedia of American Biography	encyclopedia	archives; photo	1947
Selected Letter Drafts of Ovid Butler		archives; photo	
Ovid Butler Letterbook Transcriptions	transcription	archives; photo	1862
Affectionately Yours	book	book (owned)	2004

Table 1: Example of sources used in research

Those opposed to the case study method of research might argue that it does not follow a strict scientific procedure and is, therefore, less valuable than other research methods. However, the case study's iterative process is one of its greatest strengths. Making sense of artifacts and pulling in others as their importance becomes clear to the researcher is part of the learning process and provides the opportunity for organic discovery. When trying to make connections between the past and the present, it is important to be open to discovering evidence which the researcher did not previously know existed. This might lead to even greater insights as the project shifts and the importance of different elements come to light.

## FINDINGS

### The Founding

Founded as North Western Christian University (NWCU) in 1855, the wealth of recorded history surrounding Butler University chronicles an evolution of a modern institution. To best understand the circumstances under which the university was created, it is important to take a closer look at the life of the man often attributed to be the school's very own founding father, Ovid Butler (Figure 1). He has been labeled many things, including an abolitionist, Unionist, Republican, and patriot. However, first and foremost, Ovid considered himself a Christian (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 1). His faith and involvement with the Christian Church—also referred to as Disciples of Christ—guided all that he did both in his personal and private ventures. He would celebrate much career success as an attorney, political activist, and businessman during his time in Indianapolis; “The great achievement of Butler’s life, however, was Northwestern Christian University” (*The Union Title News*, 1947, p. 2).

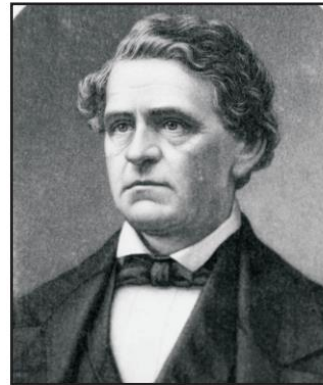


Figure 1: Ovid Butler

As the future founder of an educational institution, it could be said that Butler’s life came full circle when one realizes that he started his adult life as a self-educated schoolhouse teacher. Between the years of 1819 and 1825, he taught school in Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana (*The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1947, p. 68). Eventually, the interest which occupied his free time became his new profession, and in 1836 led him to move to Indianapolis (*The Union Title News*, 1947, p. 2). There, he formed a legal partnership with fellow attorney Calvin Fletcher. “His sound judgement, vigorous power of reasoning, and care in the preparation of his cases gave him a large and lucrative practice and he became one of the leaders of his

profession in central Indiana” (*The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1947, p. 68). Butler closed his practice soon after falling very ill in 1847 (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 91). Sick within inches of his life, Ovid recovered only by what he believed to be holy intervention. “Ovid decided that God had spared him in order that he might achieve God’s purposes, yet unveiled. In 1849, that purpose was revealed to him” (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 3). During his recovery, Butler showed an active interest in politics.

As tensions rose leading up to the American Civil War, Butler became an outspoken advocate for abolitionism. He believed that slavery was a sin against God and that the United States would pay dearly for its past with slavery, even referring to it as, “our great national sin” (Butler Davis, 2004, p.42). In one of his published essays, he wrote, “...to deprive a human being of liberty, to reduce him to slavery, and hold him as property, subject to be used, controlled, and disposed of, as other property, is a transgression of the law of the Lord...and consequently sin” (Butler, 1862, p. 111). Thus, though he first considered himself a Democrat, Butler later left the party to help form the Free-Soil Party; he even went so far as to invest in and publish several different newspapers which strove to further the Free-Soil message, to include: *The Free Democrat*, *The Free Soil Banner*, *The Free Soil Democrat*, and *The Indianapolis Journal* (*The Union Title News*, 1947, p. 2). Butler was not shy of using these publications to advocate in opposition of slavery in the United States.

Dedicated to the cause of preventing the “extension of slavery into the western territories,” the Free-Soil Party was short-lived; only operating from 1848 to 1854, it was later absorbed into the Republican Party when the latter was officially established in 1854 (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020, “Republican Party”). One primary difference between the two parties was that while Free-Soil opposed the expansion of slavery, the Republican Party

recognized it as a moral evil (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020, “Republican Party”). This aligned with Butler’s own belief that slavery was sinful, and he was instrumental in founding the Republican Party of Indiana (*The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 1947, p. 68). Carving a name for himself in the Indianapolis community, Butler was also balancing his time as a man of religion, career, and family long before talks of establishing a university in Indianapolis ever came about. However, as divisions between southern and northern states continued to grow, leaders in the Disciples of Christ had their eyes on Butler for new opportunities. “Ovid Butler was emerging as one in whom the thinking of many church leaders was combined, a man with a practical, businesslike approach and determination to act” (Waller, 2006, p. 10). In 1849, he believed that he had discovered his purpose, reason that God spared him from his terrible illness; the Disciples of Christ chose Ovid to serve as chairman of a committee to establish a premier institution of higher learning in the new American northwest (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 4). NWCU would open to students in 1855.

Even in its beginning stages, NWCU reflected the beliefs of its most influential founder as if it was a mirror. Pouring his heart and soul into the project, “Ovid wrote the charter, shepherded the bill through the legislature, and procured the necessary financial backing” (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 4). The charter and by-laws established that NWCU would serve Indianapolis as:

...an institution of learning of the highest class, for the education of the youth of all parts of the United States, and especially the states of the Northwest...to teach and inculcate the Christian faith and Christian morality, as taught in the Sacred Scriptures, discarding as uninspired and without authority all writings, formulas, creeds, and articles of faith subsequent thereto; and for the formation [promotion] of the sciences and arts. (1850, republished 1880, p. 8)

The university's purpose, as clearly outlined in its original charter, is a direct representation of the purpose God placed on Ovid's heart in 1847. NWCU was to be an institution of higher learning which offered the opportunity of a non-denominational, Christian education to the families of the Union. In fact, the university was modeled after a similar school operating in Virginia at the time, Alexander Campbell's Bethany College (Butler Davis, 2004, pp. 3-4). Ovid, however, and other members of his faith would not allow their children to attend school in a slave state.

...most of the students attending Bethany came from southern states and supported slavery. This political and ethical division based on slavery provided momentum for Ovid Butler and some of his fellow brothers in the church to found a university based on Disciples' principles—including abolition—in Indiana. (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 94)

Bethany College, like Butler University, still exists today. However, the campus it calls home is now a West Virginia address. It still claims a Disciples of Christ affiliation (Bethany College, 2020, "At a Glance" page).

Ovid had nine children in total over the course of two different marriages. His first wife, Cordelia Cole, died in 1838 shortly after Ovid's move to Indianapolis. From second marriage to Elizabeth Anne McOuat in 1840 came the birth of his six younger children: Demia, Scot, Janet, Chauncey, Thomas, and Anne (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 91). Ovid valued education and wanted to be able to provide the best learning opportunities for his children. He viewed NWCU as a location which could offer just that, as equally for his sons as for his daughters. In an undated brief written by Ovid which he titled "Women's Rights: a brief," he stated the following:

My desire is that the Institution of the North Western Christian University occupy a position in the front ranks of human progress and Christian civilization as the Experiment



and Advocate of the common rights of humanity without distinctions on account of sex, race, or color. (n.d.)

This desire translated to reality as NWCUC accepted motivated male, female, and African American students from its very opening; “Among the first class were students who had been dismissed from Bethany College because of their abolitionist beliefs” (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 98). NWCUC not only the first college in Indiana to accept both men and women on equal standing, but it was also the second college to do so in the whole of the United States (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 98). Of the two original degree programs offered—a two-year and a four-year—Ovid’s daughter Demia Butler was the first woman to graduate NWCUC with the four-year degree in 1862 (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 92).

It would seem that Demia took after her father in manner of spirit and determination. A piece written for a 1917 edition of *Butler Annual Quarterly* entitled “The Class of ’62” quoted someone who knew Demia well in life as saying the following of her:

A strong mind and an earnest nature, but a hidden strength... Her dark brown hair was smooth, but it curled, and there was the glint of fire in it. So she had two natures—there was calm in her eyes and storm in her heart. (p. 159)

Her younger brother Scot, however, took a more rebellious approach towards his father’s ideals. Scot also began his studies at NWCUC but had left school due to poor health by the time that the Civil War broke out (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 3). Rather than hoping to be able to return to finish his education, Scot had his sights set on joining the fight.

As an avid abolitionist and Unionist, Ovid was in full support of the Union during the war. However, he did not relish in the loss of life which came along with the fighting. Ovid believed that God would help the Union succeed, but the bloodshed which took place until

victory was punishment for the nation's transgressions—for slavery, the national sin. “The heart sickens in the contemplation and grows sad, Oh how sad at the thought that the sacrifice of so much human suffering and human life is required to atone for our great national sin” (Butler, 1863, Butler Davis, 2004, p. 42). When his own son, Scot, joined the Union with a fervent sense of patriotism, Ovid could think of nothing but having him home safe again. As a father, Ovid firmly preferred that Scot leave the dangerous business of soldiering behind in order to finish his education at NWCU (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 55). Ovid wrote the following in a letter to his son while Scot was stationed with his military unit:

I am most anxious that you complete your Education at the University. I have felt the want of a liberal education myself and to give it to others I have invested thousands and spent some 12 or 15 years of my life in efforts to build up the University. Of course, I am deeply anxious that my children should have the benefit of the Institution and for you to fail in this would be a matter of more than ordinary regret. (Butler, 1863, Butler Davis, 2004, p. 55)

However, Scot was caught in the honor and bravery which came with being a soldier. His reasons for fighting were aligned with a pride for his nation rather than his father's abolitionism, a point of contention between the two which can be observed in their wartime correspondence.

Further motivating Ovid to have his son home from war was Ovid's preference that his son continue to run the university as God intended Ovid to, even after Ovid's death. “Scot was to inherit the project and assure its success; therefore, it was necessary he return from the war morally and physically healthy in order to fulfill God's and thus Ovid's purposes for him” (Butler Davis, 2004, p. 4). This is where the separation between founding intention and over 150 years of evolutionary changes can first be observed.

NWCU was more than another university with a religious affiliation. It, at its very core, was founded as a slap in the face to separationists, slave owners, the Democratic Party, the Confederacy, and those in the Northern states who were apathetic towards the continued expansion of slavery into Western territories at the time. Ovid Butler broke every rule of the time by encouraging the education and graduation of all students who were invested in their education. Unlike other institutions which have stood the test of time, Butler University is in the unique position of having a past which can be celebrated in the modern era. However, there is very little focus on this past in current communications efforts.

### **Becoming Butler**

In the years that have passed since its founding, Butler University has undergone many changes to evolve from 1855's first class of 20 students to 2020's enrollment numbers which reach upwards of 4,600 undergraduates (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 98; U.S. News, 2020, "Butler University" page). The university has seen three different campuses, the first located on 20 acres of land donated by Ovid Butler on today's College Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 96). During the time that NWCU occupied its original campus, the university lost nearly all of its male students as they left school to serve their nation in the Civil War (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 99). During the war, Ovid offered financial support in order to keep the university open for its female students, and NWCU later offered free tuition to those soldiers who were permanently disabled (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 99).

In 1877 it was at the second campus, located in Irvington, that NWCU was renamed as Butler University in honor of its founder, despite adamant protest from Ovid Butler himself (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 100). "Ovid disliked ostentation, but the board felt strongly that he should be so honored, and persisted" (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 100). Ovid passed at his home

residence in July of 1881; the house which he called “Forest Home” still stands today as a private residence (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 92). Despite pressure from a growing number of Ku Klux Klan membership in the Indianapolis area, Butler University maintained its longstanding policy of admitting students of color into the early 1920s (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 101). For some time, the Klan’s Grand Dragon lived near campus; he was tried and convicted for the murder of a young female Butler University student in 1925 (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 101). “The trial and surrounding publicity exposed many Klansmen, including over half of the Indiana General Assembly, and destroyed much of the Klan’s power in the state” (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 101).

Finally, 1926 saw the construction of the Fairview campus, where Butler University still stands today. The university had outgrown its Irvington location and went to work on two buildings for the new campus, Jordan Hall and Butler Fieldhouse (renamed Hinkle Fieldhouse in 1966) (Childs-Helton, 2010, p. 101). Since then, the campus has expanded to contain six different colleges and the academic buildings to house them all, to include the Fairbanks Center for Communication and Technology and the Andre B. Lacy School of Business. As is discussed in the findings below, Butler University has become a modern institution with a brand image to match. However, in this forward thinking, it is possible that the university has lost sight of how valuable its triumphant past can be when presented to a modern audience.

## Today's Butler University

In its modern era, Butler University has evolved its brand in many ways. The most recent version of the university's brand image presents itself via specific fonts, colors, word choice, and—of course—the logo. The current logo depicts the image of a determined-looking bulldog head, an animal which has served as the school's mascot since at least 1919 (Figure 2) (Butler University, 2020, Butler Bulldogs page). This replaced the previous mascot, the Butler University Christians, which served as a reference to the institution's prior religious affiliation.



Figure 2: Current Butler University logo

The idea of changing the school's mascot from the Christians to the Bulldogs is said to have come from the staff of the university student newspaper in 1919 (Butler University, 2020, "Butler Bulldogs" page). During a less than stellar football season, an upcoming game between Butler University and the nearby Franklin College prompted the student newspaper staff to run a cartoon which portrayed Butler University as a bulldog, supposedly inspired by one of the fraternity's house dogs (Butler University, 2020, "Butler Bulldogs" page). Though athletes at today's Franklin College of Franklin, Indiana are the Grizzlies, in 1919 they were the Franklin College Baptists (Butler University, 2020, "Butler Bulldogs" page) (Franklin College, 2020, "Franklin College Facts" page). "The next school paper came out with a big Page One cartoon showing Shimmy the bulldog, labeled 'Butler,' taking a bite out of the pants seat of a figure labeled John the Baptist" (Butler University, 2020, "Butler Bulldogs" page). Thus, Butler University's bulldog imagery was born.

Butler University has really run with the bulldog imagery in recent years, especially following the success of its men's basketball program in 2010, when the underdog team

advanced to the NCAA Final Four championship game for the first time (Keefer, 2015). The newest version of the bulldog and all that goes with it appeared in the rebrand of 2015. The bulldog logo is a little tougher looking, the font a little more modern, and the determined work ethic of a particular canine ever more emphasized. In 2018, Butler University started to run the “Unleashed” advertising campaign, which proudly proclaimed, “Good things happen when you release a Butler Bulldog” (Butler University, 2019, Unleashed: Extended Cut, 0:12). A bulldog sets its sights on its goal and does not let go; a Butler Bulldog is just the same on the basketball court, in the classroom, and in the workforce.

The Unleashed television advertisement is competitive and uplifting in tone, making it sound as if a Butler University graduate will be a winner in whatever field they choose to pursue. The narration includes lines such as, “We aren’t just dreamers; we’re doers” (Butler University, 2019, Unleashed: Extended Cut, 0:02). This suggests that high school students should want to be a Butler Bulldog and employers should want to hire those with a Butler University education. Visuals which accompany the narration and upbeat music include short video clips of students spending time on campus, creating art, talking with professors, practicing athletics, walking through the Indiana State Capitol, and more, as well as live mascot Butler Blue III (Butler University, 2019, Unleashed: Extended Cut). The full advertisement is about one minute long, though there is also a shorter 30-second cut. Both are run during televised men’s basketball games in which Butler University is competing. While the message is positive, it again supports a brand which is running at full speed into the future and does not provide any element of the institution’s historical value.

Butler University’s other messages to an external-facing public can perhaps be best summarized by the university website’s homepage. At the time of writing, the homepage features

a large carousel of photos promoting three primary messages: the Butler Beyond campaign, a new master's program offering, and the introduction of the school's newest edition to the live mascot program (Figure 3) (Butler University, 2020, homepage). Butler Beyond is a fundraising effort to build new on-campus facilities and advance the campus experience. The addition of a master's in management program is indicative of the university's goals of expanding post-undergraduate education. The recent arrival of Butler Blue IV is a marketing tactic, one that has been very successful. The

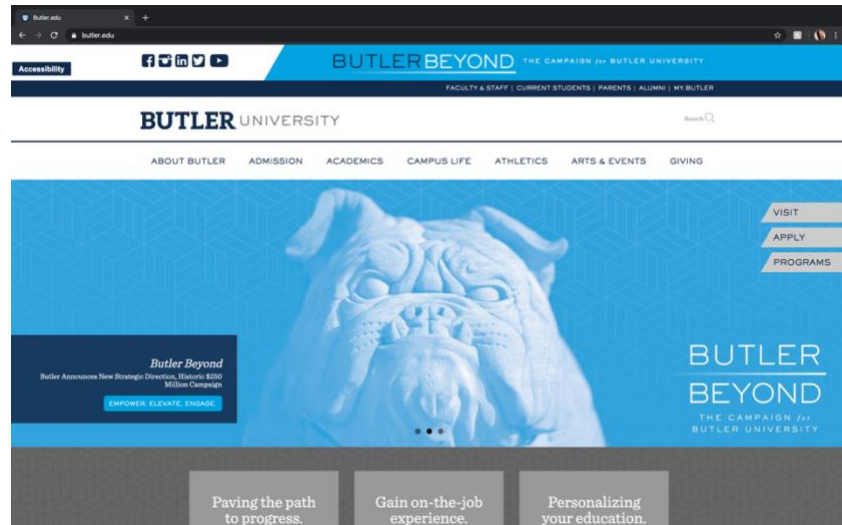


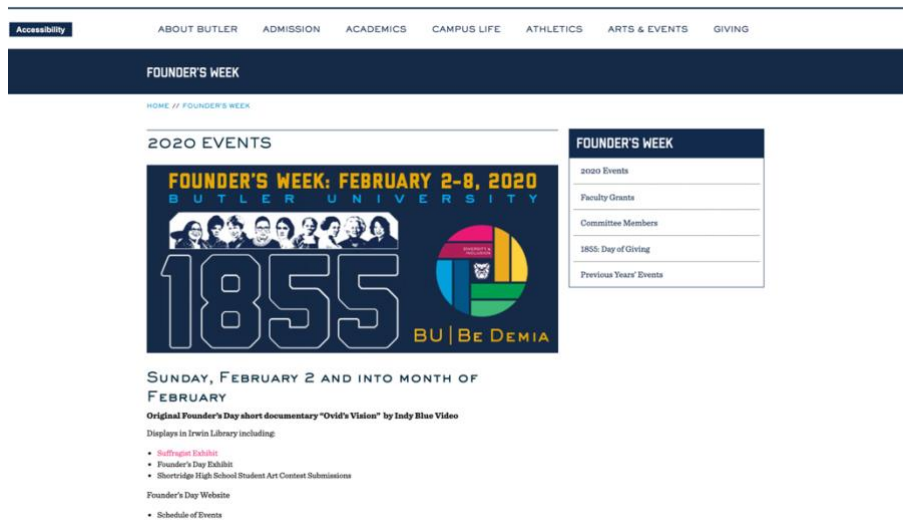
Figure 3: Butler University website homepage

commonality between these three stories cycling through the homepage is that they advertise the new coming to Butler University. Aside from the topics of the promoted stories, the language used on the Butler University website is that of a brand which desires to be viewed as youthful and forward-thinking. Language includes words and phrases such as, “paving the path to progress” and “empower, elevate, engage” (Butler University, 2020, homepage). If one only saw the main pages of the website, there is a sense that Butler University is a young, modern brand without a long past or historical roots. This is as opposed to an institution such as Harvard University, which might heighten its audience’s sense of its tradition and history through its brand.

Currently, the only significant mention of Ovid Butler at the university is communicated via Founder’s Week celebrations. These events take place annually in early February to

commemorate Ovid Butler’s birthday. However, Founder’s Week communications are directed towards an internal public consisting of Butler University faculty, staff, and students. The theme of Butler University’s 2020 Founder’s Week was “BU, Be Demia” (Butler University, 2020, “Founder’s Week” page). Centering communications around Ovid Butler’s daughter coincided with the fact that 2020 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment which granted women in the United States the right to vote. As such, the calendar of events for the week promoted female authors and speakers, some focusing on topics of women’s suffrage (Figures 4 & 5) (Butler University, 2020, “Founder’s Week” page). Although Ovid and Demia supported education for women, focusing Founder’s Week on a topic that is mostly unrelated to the founder is confusing and does little to educate the audience about the founding of Butler University. Furthermore, despite her name sitting at the center of the week’s theme and printed on every poster, social media post, and t-shirt, Demia Butler was absent from the calendar of events; the same could be said of her father.

**Figure 4: Butler University Founder’s Week 2020 events**





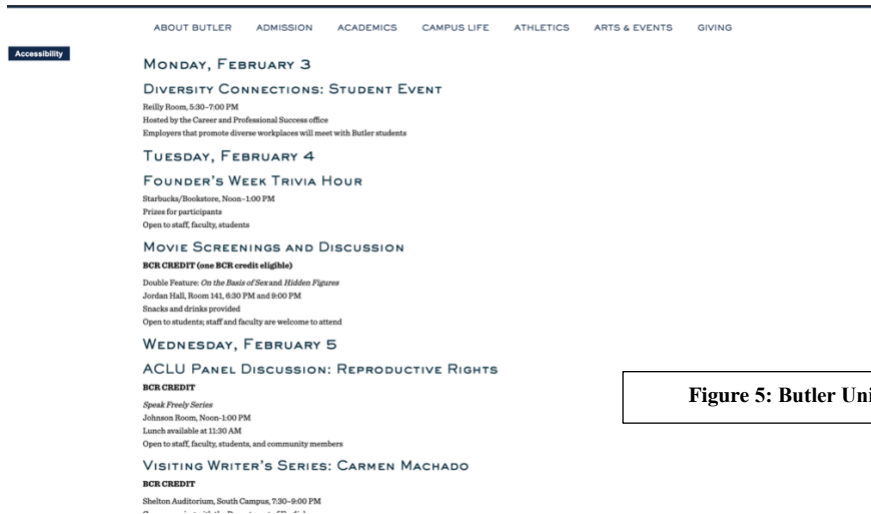


Figure 5: Butler University Founder's Week 2020 events

Demia's likeness appears in the logo for Founder's Week 2020, which was replicated on posters and t-shirts, as well as online postings. She is the woman in the center of the lineup of nine women (Figure 6) (Butler University, 2020, "Founder's Week" page). However, the other eight women appear to be selected and ordered on logo at random. One might expect the women pictured beside Demia to all be women from Indiana who carved out their own slice of history in the Hoosier state, such as Madame CJ Walker. This is not the case. Alternatively, one might expect the other women to be the suffragettes who were the topic of the week's keynote presentation. With the exception of Ida B. Wells, this is also not the case. The other women pictured alongside Demia and Wells include Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Barbara Bush, and Amelia Earhart among others.



Figure 6: Butler University Founder's Week 2020 logo

While these women certainly accomplished much in their lives, their connection to Demia, Butler University, Founder's Week, women's suffrage, or the state of Indiana is weak at best. The selection of women to be included is only more confusing when considering the t-shirts handed out at 2020 Founder's Week events. The t-shirt bears the same logo on its back, but underneath is a lengthy list of more seemingly random women (Butler University, 2020, Founder's Week t-shirt). This expanded list includes names of modern pop stars such as Lizzo and Lady Gaga next to the names of first ladies such as Nancy Reagan (Figure 7). Madame CJ Walker is thrown into the jumble of names here, although so is Angela Brown, who is an opera singer with a social media following of less than 3,000 on any given platform (Instagram, 2020, @msangelabrown; Twitter, 2020, @msangelabrown).

There appears to be no rhyme or reason as to the ordering or grouping of the names. Once again, there is little connection between most of these women, let alone a connection to Demia, Butler University, Founder's Week, the state of Indiana, or women's suffrage. For a week that supposedly exists

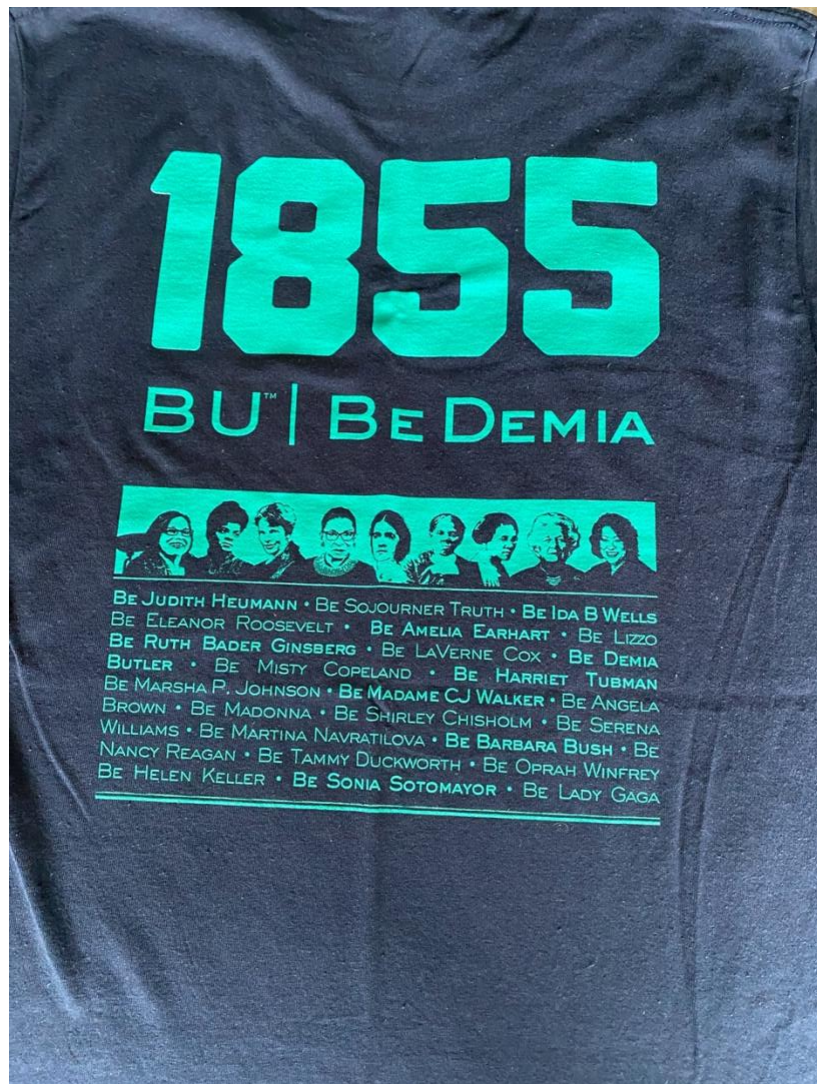


Figure 7: Butler University Founder's Week 2020 t-shirt

to honor the founding of Butler University, there is almost no connection to Ovid Butler in any of the celebration.

The 2020 Founder's Week t-shirt serves as just one example of how the week of events strays from serving its supposed purpose of informing internal publics about Butler University's past and engaging them with materials related to Ovid Butler. When it is considered that Founder's Week is the only significant reference to Ovid Butler that the university endorses, it is clear that the school's history is not currently valued when communicating with external publics such as potential students and their parents. Butler University's modern brand image does not make any reference to its past that an outside viewer would connect with abolitionism or equal education for men and women. There is a lot of good material to work with when it comes to Butler University's long history of being an accepting and diverse institution. However, Founder's Week is regrettably insufficient in serving as the only space where this past is celebrated.

## **DISCUSSION**

Butler University does not currently utilize its founding father in any official marketing materials aimed at an external audience, thus presenting a missed opportunity. While on one hand, the university appears wholly focused on portraying a modern and youthful brand image, on the other, it keeps historical buildings like Jordan Hall and cites a tradition of academic vigor. Butler University's longstanding tradition of academic excellence can be traced back to Ovid Butler himself. The university is an institution of learning in the unique position of having always offered a premiere education tailored to support and challenge students of all kinds who value academic achievement. As of 2020, Butler University's mission states:

Our mission is to provide the highest quality of liberal and professional education and to integrate the liberal arts with professional education, by creating and fostering a stimulating intellectual community built upon interactive dialogue and inquiry among students, faculty, and staff.

This mission focuses exclusively on the educational elements of the university. However, this intellectual focus or reference to tradition is missing from the institution's modern marketing strategies. In all fairness, Butler University's success on the men's basketball court and acceptance into the Big East conference has placed the university in front of a national audience, and it is important to recognize and celebrate that fact. However, the traditional Butler University student is not an NBA hopeful and is likely not selecting a university to attend based solely on the success of athletics. Rather, the traditional student Butler University is an individual who is searching for high-quality education and an academic challenge. Modern Butler University students have that in common with those who enrolled in NWCU nearly 200 years ago.

Through its upbeat music and aesthetically pleasing images, the Unleashed campaign supports the idea that Butler University students are ambitious, motivated, and passionate in whatever they do. Although it makes no direct reference to Ovid Butler, it could be argued that these are qualities which could also be found in his character and the characters of—in their own ways—Demia and Scot. Here presents itself a perfect opportunity to integrate Butler University's founder into modern promotional strategies. This is similar to how those “high-heritage” universities previously mentioned capitalize on the “quality and prestige related to a university's history” and their “track record of delivering value” (Rose, Rose, & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). If the modern marketing is focused on sharing the gritty, driven image of a Butler Bulldog, then let it allow for the connection to Ovid Butler's own driven attitude when setting

out to create a university where one previously did not exist. Let it allow for the connection to the boldness of Ovid Butler to name this school North Western Christian University, as the name itself was a proclamation of resistance in the face of those who supported the expansion of slavery into the Northwestern territory. If the modern Butler University wishes to portray itself as forward-thinking, then let it allow its audiences to realize that this is a university that has always been ahead of its time and intends to continue that trend in the future.

While Butler University has the opportunity to use its history to support and fulfill its mission, it should be careful to do so with respect. Ovid Butler is not a mascot or caricature; he is a real person who helped to establish a university which has—thus far—stood the test of time. To attribute his name or likeness to modern causes for which it is impossible to know whether he would have supported or refuted would be unwise. Likewise, to treat his ideals as if they were items on a buffet and only choose ones which support certain modern narratives would be irresponsible. In recent years, Founder's Week has had very little to do with Ovid Butler and more to do with an opportunity for the university to check the block of having mentioned its founder. The only significant events during Founder's Week tend to be talks and presentations which are only weakly—if at all—connected to the university's founding.

Founder's Week could be utilized (as it seems to have been originally intended) as a method to educate internal audiences on the history of the university, to include students, faculty, and staff. Although Butler University was the second college in the nation—and the first in the state of Indiana—to admit female students and students of color on an equal basis, this is not a fact that internal publics are reminded of often. If only once annually, Founder's Week should highlight the unique history of Butler University by providing a talk or film screening which tells the story of the founding and Ovid Butler's role in it. More opportunities should be provided—

and incentivized—for current students to engage with the history, building upon their understanding of what makes their university great.

Though this research can only speculate as to why the modern university seems hesitant to tell the story of its past in any official and widespread capacity, suspicions lie with the fact that Ovid Butler was so motivated by his faith. It is nearly impossible—and would be irresponsible—to tell his story without making reference to Ovid Butler's ties to the Disciples of Christ. His faith was the driving factor in all he did, especially in the founding of NWCUC. As mentioned previously, he wholeheartedly believed that God spared him from his dire illness for the purposes of establishing the university. Ovid was also such a motivated abolitionist because he believed slavery to be a moral evil and a sin against God (Butler, 1862, p. 111). Therefore, he was doubly dedicated to creating a university which was capable of educating his children and others at a level which would meet his standards without having to enroll them in Alexander Campbell's Bethany College in the slave state Virginia (Butler Davis, 2004, pp. 3-4). This story cannot be told by redacting the words God and Christianity from its pages.

In its modern form, Butler University is a secular institution which arguably retains no noticeable reference to its religious past. This is likely an intentional separation, maintained today in what is presumably an effort to avoid excluding any potential students. While it is undeniable that Ovid Butler's morals and ethics were heavily based in his faith, that does not make them any less valuable. Two people can reach the same conclusion without taking the same path of reasoning to get there. When this occurs in a Supreme Court decision, it is called a concurrence. If four of nine justices rule that the question in a case is Constitutional for one reason and a fifth justice agrees with the Constitutional ruling but for different reasoning, then the fifth justice concurs with the first four. The issuing of this concurrence still contributes to the

majority opinion, and the ruling stands. In the case of Butler University, Ovid Butler was undeniably a strong abolitionist, and he supported his abolitionism with Christian beliefs. Others can agree with his conclusion without agreeing with his reasoning. The modern university can concur with his beliefs on a basis which is not religious and celebrate a founding based in abolitionism and support of formal education for women.

In other words, Butler University has the opportunity to celebrate Ovid Butler's ideals which influenced the founding because they largely align with modern standards for equality in education. Combined with the fact that tradition can be a positive factor in a university's brand image (Idris & Whitfield, 2014, p. 53), it makes sense to include reference to the founding in modern promotional materials. That being true, when offering informational materials or experiences related to Ovid Butler, such as those related to Founder's Week, the university should be cautious not to wipe reference to Ovid's faith from the narrative. As his Christianity was such a driving factor in his beliefs, it would be disrespectful not to portray that. However, this is not to advocate that Butler University should return to publicizing itself as a Christian institution. Rather, the university should integrate its history into the modern brand image in order to emphasize that Butler University has always been ahead of its time in the best way possible.

Research supports the idea that branding a university with reference to prestige and tradition of the institution's past can be beneficial for the overall marketing strategy (Rose, Rose, & Merchant, 2017, p. 340). While Butler University's current strategy is focused on promoting a modern brand image which has eyes set on the future, there is plenty of room to integrate what should be celebrated of the university's past. Specifically, the university needs to decide whether it wants to pay respect to Ovid Butler or not, because the effort should not be done halfway. He

should either not be mentioned at all or celebrated appropriately for his accomplishments in life. Not paying full respect or in accurately representing his life and motives is worse than not mentioning him at all. However, as Ovid's ambitions and beliefs were the starting force which helped the modern Butler University align itself where it is today, it only seems right to celebrate the past.

With any research, this project and its recommendations suffer from limitations. By focusing the case study around the founding of one specific university, it is unclear how well these recommendations can be applied to Butler University's competitors. Those interested would need to perform their own deep dive into the founding of their university and learn its history. Ovid Butler was an exceptional man with some unpopular beliefs for his time, although the majority would agree with him in modern context. Butler University's location in what was the northwestern territories also proves to be a limitation of any widespread application of these suggestions. It was only under the combination of these extraordinary circumstances that NWCU was able to exist. For colleges which were founded in the South or the Confederacy, it is unlikely that their founders shared beliefs which are still popular in today's climate. Another limitation is recognized in the fact that, for the most part, this research compared and contrasted NWCU's founding in 1855 with Butler University's current state in 2020. There is a large gap of time in between the founding and modern day which could be more closely examined.

Future researchers looking to expand on this study of Butler University might take special care to look at the steady evolution of marketing communication through the years rather than pitting the founding directly against modern times. Future projects might also find success in interviewing or polling audiences (both internal and external) about their knowledge of Butler University's past. Those looking to apply similar research to a different college might follow a



similar model by working through the history of their institution in a chronological order. Again, it could prove beneficial to examine more than just the earliest and most recent artifacts.

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