

THE CULTURED
SCHOLAR
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

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PLAN

Sample Client

Contact: Jane Smith

Project: Harrison, AR Reputation Management

Prepared By: Felicia S. C. Gooden, M.S.

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Salutations Jane,

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on this reputation management project! This will definitely be a long-term effort and it will require much time, dedication, and careful planning of each step, each project, and each execution in order to achieve the Four Pillars as outlined by Boone County.

What I discovered in my preliminary research is that when one searches “Harrison Arkansas”, “Harrison Arkansas Racism” shows up as a suggested search. While the former only has a couple of negative news reports found on the first two or three pages of Google, the latter search phrase has pages and pages and pages of scathing news stories as recent as January of this year that push the narrative of Harrison being a highly racist town. News pieces to change the narrative or tell a different story are minimal. So, we have a lot of work to do.

I’m thinking that instead of trying to beat the racially charged views, Harrison could serve as the poster child for embracing the racist minority in a way that promotes peace and coexistence. The racial reality is embedded so deep that there may not be away to rid of it, so the better approach may be to find common ground and embrace it.

Look over the preliminary plan and let me know what you think.

With gratitude,

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THE CULTURED STRATEGY

The Harrison and #believeboonecounty project will have multiple facets in order to achieve multiple targets for the Harrison, AR municipality. The overall picture to be painted will showcase Harrison as an All-American town that is rich with history, unique natural landmarks, great quality of life, and an inclusive community.

The communications strategy will begin with a local campaign to gain support from local businesses and drive the state/regional conversation around the inclusive nature of the Harrison community. The goal will be to take back control of the Harrison narrative in order to achieve key targets set by the municipality.

There will be an additional national campaign to position Harrison as a town that has racial challenges just like any town in America, but Harrison sees itself as a unique place that emphasizes inclusivity of all people, opinions, traditions, and belief systems – even if they are controversial. This communication is intended to put Harrison and the state of Arkansas on the map to gain national media coverage in order to attract new businesses, new talent, and expand tourism.

THE ISSUE

The issue to be addressed is Harrison, Arkansas' reputation as being the most racist town in America. All efforts will be directed toward changing this narrative with the greater goal of achieving the key development goals of Boone County also known as the Four Pillars.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Our current communications infrastructure is as follows:

- Communications partners
 - SWAGBOT: Shawn Matthews,
 - The Cultured Scholar Strategic Communications: Felicia Gooden
- Timeline
 - Phase I Deadline:

- Phase II Deadline:
- Phase III Deadline:
- Budget
 - \$75,000 for the entire project

GOALS

Harrison, AR has four main goals for this communications campaign. These goals, also known as the Four Pillars, along with corresponding targets are as follows:

- **Advance the region's economy**
 - Bring in and build more businesses
 - Expand tourism
 - Attract new residents of middle class to upper middle-class income levels
- **Improve the quality of life**
 - Create wholesome, tight-knit community
 - Promote inclusiveness to attract diversity of talent, investors, and new residents
 - Protect the environment through smart development and conservation of natural resources
- **Develop, retain, and acquire talent**
 - Attract new businesses and corporate expansion
 - Appeal to individuals and families seeking new opportunities and quality of life
 - Promote training and education opportunities in key industries
- **Tell our story**
 - Set the record straight on Harrison's demographic and current quality of life
 - Change the narrative on the reality of racism in Harrison
 - Promote the town's heritage and All-American charm
 - Communicate authentically to effectively impact the local, regional, and national conversation

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience will be adjusted for local, state, and national outreach. Target audiences are generally identified below:

- **Local ([Boone County, Arkansas](#))**
 - Men and women age 18 years and older
 - 96% White; very few minorities, but they exist
 - 4% minorities, including Black/African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Two or more Races (Use diversity message to inspire the minority population to reach out to friends, family, and loved ones. Tell their story.)
 - Average minimum education acquired is high school diploma or above (85% of population; only 15% of the population is said to have a bachelor's degree or higher; based on ages 25 and up))
 - Average income approx. \$39,000
 - Business owners (for fundraising and public-private partnerships)
 - Average citizens (drive positive Harrison narrative with inclusive spin to drive a new conversation on quality of life in Boone County, particularly Harrison)
- **State ([Arkansas](#))**
 - Men and women age 18 years and older
 - 79% white, 15% Black/African American, 7.3% Hispanic; Asian, American Indian, Two or more races all under 5%
 - Average minimum education acquired is high school diploma or above (85.2% of population; only 21.5% of the population is said to have a bachelor's degree or higher; based on ages 25 and up))
 - Average income approx. \$42,300
 - Business owners (for expansion opportunities)
 - Average citizens (drive positive Harrison narrative with inclusive spin to drive a new conversation on quality of life in Boone County, particularly Harrison)
 - Professionals seeking new opportunities (encourage relocation to a quaint and inclusive municipality)
- **National ([United States](#))**
 - Men and women age 18 years and older
 - 76.9% white, 13.3% Black/African American, 17.8% Hispanic; 5.7% Asian; American Indian, Two or more races all under 5%

- Average minimum education acquired is high school diploma or above (87% of population; only 30.3% of the population is said to have a bachelor's degree or higher, based on ages 25 and up)
- Average income approx. \$55,000
- Business owners and corporations (for expansion opportunities)
- Average citizens (drive positive Harrison narrative with inclusive spin to drive a new conversation on quality of life in Boone County, particularly Harrison; encourage tourism)
- Professionals seeking new opportunities (encourage relocation to a quaint and inclusive municipality)

RESEARCH

Preliminary research on the central issue to be addressed is as follows:

- **News coverage**

- "Harrison, Arkansas Continues To Be One Of The Most Racist Towns In America" (uproxx.com, Jan 2015, page 1 of Google search for "Harrison Arkansas" and "Harrison, Arkansas racism")
- "What one town's fight with the KKK says about the latest battle over white nationalism" (Slate.com, comes up in search results as "What Harrison, Arkansas...", April 2017, page 1 of Google search for "Harrison Arkansas" and "Harrison Arkansas racism")
- "The KKK Embraces Diversity in Harrison, Arkansas" (vice.com, March 2014, page 1 of Google search for "Harrison, Arkansas" and "Harrison, Arkansas racism")
- "Independent Lens . BANISHED . Harrison, Arkansas | PBS" (film synopsis and culture piece on pbs.org, page 1 of Google search for "Harrison Arkansas" and "Harrison Arkansas racism")
- 'Most racist town in America' (arktimes.com – Arkansas Times; Nov. 2016, page 1 of Google search for "Harrison Arkansas racism")
- "US town's public battle with racism: Meeting the head of the KKK in Harrison, Arkansas" (Sky News, video report on YouTube; Aug. 2017, page 1 of Google search for "Harrison Arkansas racism")
- Inside the most racist town in America where "diversity is a code word for white genocide" (mirror.co.uk – The Daily Mirror; Nov. 2016; back linked in Arkansas Times article)
- "Women's Klan Rises in Arkansas" (ualrpublicradio.org – Public Radio

from UA Little Rock News and Culture for Arkansas; July 2017; page 1 of Google search for “Harrison Arkansas racism”)

- “Harrison land owner celebrates removal of billboard considered racist” (ky3.com – Local News; Jan 2018; page 1 of Google search for “Harrison Arkansas racism”)
- “In Arkansas, white town is a black mark” (Al Jazeera; Dec 2014; page 3 of Google search for “Harrison Arkansas racism”)
- **Major news coverage:** North Arkansas College students use racist taunts against visiting team from Kansas during basketball game (Jan. 2018; 2nd page of Google search for “Harrison Arkansas racism”)
 - <http://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article194894974.html> (Article includes Tweets from reporters)
 - http://www.parsonssun.com/sports/article_b320f0d8-f7ef-11e7-b139-334d12d808be.html
 - <https://sports.yahoo.com/report-kansas-community-college-teams-pelted-racial-taunts-racist-town-america-002255428.html>
 - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/2018/01/16/arkansas-school-investigates-racist-taunts-during-games/109518018/>
 - <http://www.thv11.com/article/news/local/visiting-college-basketball-team-reportedly-faced-racist-chants-in-harrison/91-508519745>
 - http://harrisondaily.com/news/esters-alleged-racial-taunts-should-be-investigated/article_55616b7c-fa2d-11e7-bd6d-3f770854f529.html
- **Previous efforts to change the narrative**
 - “Arkansas town with KKK ties working to bury racism, literally” (CBS News; April 2014; page 4 of Google search for “Harrison Arkansas racism”)
 - “Arkansas Town Responds To Controversial ‘Anti-Racist Is A Code Word For Anti-White’ Sign” (Huffington Post; Dec. 2017; page 3 of Google search for “Harrison Arkansas racism”)

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The central issue at hand is the prevalence of racism in Harrison, Arkansas. While Thomas Robb is a major voice in conjunction with the Ku Klux Klan in the area, Harrison has a history of racism that predates Robb. Considering that the latest news relating to racism in Harrison pertains to athletes from North Arkansas College taunting a visiting team from Kansas, the conversation must be focused on the presence of racism in Harrison's overall culture.

If there is a serious, deep-rooted racial problem within the collective consciousness of Harrison, then mere PR will not help. The entire community will have to come together to transform its collective identity, and communications efforts would be directed toward telling that story. This is an opportunity to turn Harrison's greatest liability into its greatest asset by embracing what appears to be wrong and making it right.

Key stakeholders in this effort include

- The citizens of Harrison
- State and local government of Harrison, Arkansas
- Business owners in the area who will be associated with the effort to change Harrison's image
- Thomas Robb, the Ku Klux Klan, and their supporters
- Minorities living in and around Harrison
- Decision makers at corporations or medium sized businesses Harrison seeks to attract
- The nation and world at large that Harrison would seek to attract for tourism and talent development

MESSAGE CULTIVATION

The messaging for Harrison and Boone County must address the past, present, and future states of racist ideology in the town, county and the state. A realistic story of where the town came from and its ongoing efforts to eradicate racism in the area will help paint a better picture. The goal is to mitigate the notion that Harrison is a town filled with flaming racists seeking to harm or discriminate against anyone who is non-white. The goal of the message is to paint Harrison (and Arkansas) as a place that is coming into the 21st century and actively working to create a better quality of life through the

promotion of diversity and co-existence of multiple belief systems.

Ideally, there would be a campaign -- maybe even a documentary -- that chronicles the rise and fall of racism in the area. It would showcase, in detail, the history of Harrison, the history of racism in Harrison, and the transition of the town from a "sundown town" to one where racist ideology is only promoted by a select minority that merely seeks to be heard. The town is making progress and will continue to do so, and since the town's history cannot be erased and the hate group's First and Fourteenth amendment rights must be respected, the goal of the town is to find a way for diversity of thought, including that of Thomas Robb, to coexist in a safe manner likened to what can be found in Stone Mountain, GA.

PROBLEM

Harrison, Arkansas is notorious for its issues with quelling the presence and voices of racist ideology. Thomas Robb and his chapter of the Ku Klux Klan are very outspoken and have rights to free speech as well as life, liberty, and their pursuit of happiness, even if the majority disagrees with their views. Unfortunately, events this year have pointed to a deeper racial problem within the culture of Harrison that needs to be addressed.

SOLUTION

A long-term effort to mitigate the effects of aggressive racially charged campaigns will be the number one priority of the Harrison municipal legislature in partnership with Boone County. There must also be an in-depth investigation into the attitudes of the population of Harrison citizens to get an accurate scope of how many in the town and in what walks of life hold racially divisive views. Plans to accommodate all beliefs and ideologies, regardless of offensiveness, must be drafted to ensure that every voice is heard and respected in the municipality. The goal will be to promote coexistence and peace.

ACTION

Below a short list of short-term and long-term actions to be taken to change the narrative:

- **Short-Term**

- Take surveys of personal beliefs of Harrison citizens (get an accurate representation of how citizens feel about the town's racist past, recent events, and the future of the town)
- Town Halls to hear the voices of the citizens and business owners on both sides to directly interact with various views and determine what should be done to change the image of Harrison from the citizen perspective

- Actively promote existing events geared toward diversity; control the narrative by getting ahead of any protests from opposing views (ensure they are peaceful gatherings); show Harrison as being a town that prides itself on peaceful expression of First Amendment rights
- Invite local and national news outlets to inclusive events and Town Hall meetings to show the region and nation the efforts to work with the community to mitigate the effects of racist ideology and work toward peaceful coexistence that promotes full inclusion
- **Long-Term**
 - Plan and host diversity and inclusion events according to feedback from surveys and town halls to promote unity in the town
 - Promote businesses that are for diversity and inclusion, including any adversarial businesses that are forward thinking and open to inclusive coexistence
 - Consider racial education programs open to the public to tell the truth about the history of racism in Harrison, the state of Arkansas, and the United states to paint a picture of progress, albeit gradual; these can be open workshops or forums for the public to attract tourism and/or programs infused into local school curricula
 - Use racially charged national news stories as opportunities to voice and reinforce Harrison's position on racism in America and its locale from a position of empathy for all involved
 - Create incentives for business in the area to promote diversity
 - Create incentives for businesses and corporations to expand in the area, thus attracting new talent
 - Promote quality of life in through tourism to attract new visitors to the area with the goal of converting tourists into residents

SPOKESPEOPLE

Key spokespeople for this effort will include:

- Harrison Community Task Force on Race Relations Representative
- Harrison Mayor
- Boone County Administrator or representative
- Local business owners willing to participate
- Local citizens willing to participate
- Thomas Robb (if willing to promote a diverse and inclusive town that also allows his interests to thrive; at least have a conversation as shown in [CBS video](#))

NEWSHOOKS

Newshooks will ideally play on local and national news stories to drive the conversation in a way that promotes Harrison's agenda to change the town's image and overall narrative. A few general hooks include:

- Why Harrison, Arkansas Isn't the Most Racist Town in America
- Why Harrison, Arkansas is the Definition of Inclusion
- How Harrison is Changing the Face of Race Relations
- How Harrison is Reinventing What Inclusion Looks Like
- Three Ways Harrison is Promoting Diversity
- How Harrison is Using Its Racially Charged Past to Build a New Future
- Harrison Government Partners with Community to Promote Diversity and Inclusion
- Harrison Embraces Thomas Robb and Ku Klux Klan to Change the Face of Inclusion

CHANNELS AND OUTLETS

Below is a running list of communications channels to be utilized in this long-term effort:

- Direct mail campaigns
- News media
- Billboards
- Surveys
- Social Media
- Email campaigns
- Town hall meetings

NEWS AND MEDIA

Preferred News Media Options

- Op-Ed (written by the mayor, town/county representative)
- Letters to the Editor (from citizens and business owners)
- Radio shows (mayor, town/county representative)

- Talk shows (mayor, town/county representative)

REPORTERS AND MEDIA

Reporter and media contact database will be compiled and maintained by SWAGBOT and The Culture Scholar Strategic Communications. All contacts already held by Harrison and Boone County will need to be shared with the aforementioned parties to prevent overlap or double work.

PITCH STRATEGY

Reporters will be pitched newshooks from the list above as well as any developed in the event of relevant breaking news. Reporters will also be pitched on events promoting inclusion in the area to tell the story of Harrison as an inclusive community taking action to end the harms of racism.

DELIVERABLES/COLLATERAL/EVENTS

Below are various deliverables to distribute to reporters to help them create their stories. These will be used at the discretion of Harrison and Boone County:

- Media advisories
- News releases
- Fact sheets
- Brief bios of spokespeople
- Brochure
- Web newsroom
- Media briefings

ADDITIONAL DELIVERABLES

- Personal time and attention for reporters
- Exclusive interviews with spokespeople

TRACKING COVERAGE

Coverage will be tracked through a mix of Google search to test story ranking in search as well as the use of social listening tools that pick up on any news stories, social mentions, etc. pertaining to Harrison, Arkansas and Boone County.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Performance will be evaluated by analyzing the results of coverage as well as reports on demographic changes, revenue increases, and other relevant reports provided by Harrison and Boone County. All evaluations will be made according to the key deliverables as outlined in the Four Pillars.