THERE ARE NEW SUNS:

BUILDING A TRANSFORMATIVE NARRATIVE FOR THE BLACK REPARATIONS MOVEMENT

Prepared By:
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Inspired by the 13 inaugural Reparations Narrative Lab participants and the wisdom of the millions of Black folks who have paved the way and created the space for this report to be published.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally.”

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,*

The Reparations Narrative Lab, a collaborative program of Liberation Ventures, officially launched in August 2022 with a founding cohort of 13 members representing some of the most important thinking on Black reparations over the last 50 years. This report and the accompanying Narrative House schematic seek to capture the Lab’s work conducted over the last year, which focused on analyzing current public narratives, perceptions, and understandings of reparations for Black people in the United States and creating a tool to support the movement in building narrative power.

The 13 Lab members included Dr. Jean-Pierre Brutus, Malkia Devich-Cyril, Dr. Tiffany Crutcher, Kamille Gardner, Dreisen Heath, Kenniss Henry, Gerry Johnson, Amity Paye, Dr. David Ragland, Aisha Shillingford, Robert Thomas, Richard Wallace, and Vennekia Williams.

Lab allies who joined multiple lab sessions and played a critical role in the discussions included actress, writer, and producer Erika Alexander and visual journalist Ben Arnon, co-founders of Color Farm Media, and Nicole Carty and Anthony Torres of the new youth-led racial justice movement, Get Free. Consulting and research for the Lab were supported by Melinda Weekes-Laidlow, Kristen Marston, Christina Pao, Harmony Labs, and Swayable.

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A host of advocates joined our focus group sessions to support the creation of the Narrative House, their names can be found in the Appendix.

The microsite, which serves as a repository of our work over the last year, was designed by our friends at Milli. Bethanie Hines provided the stunning photography that you see throughout the site.

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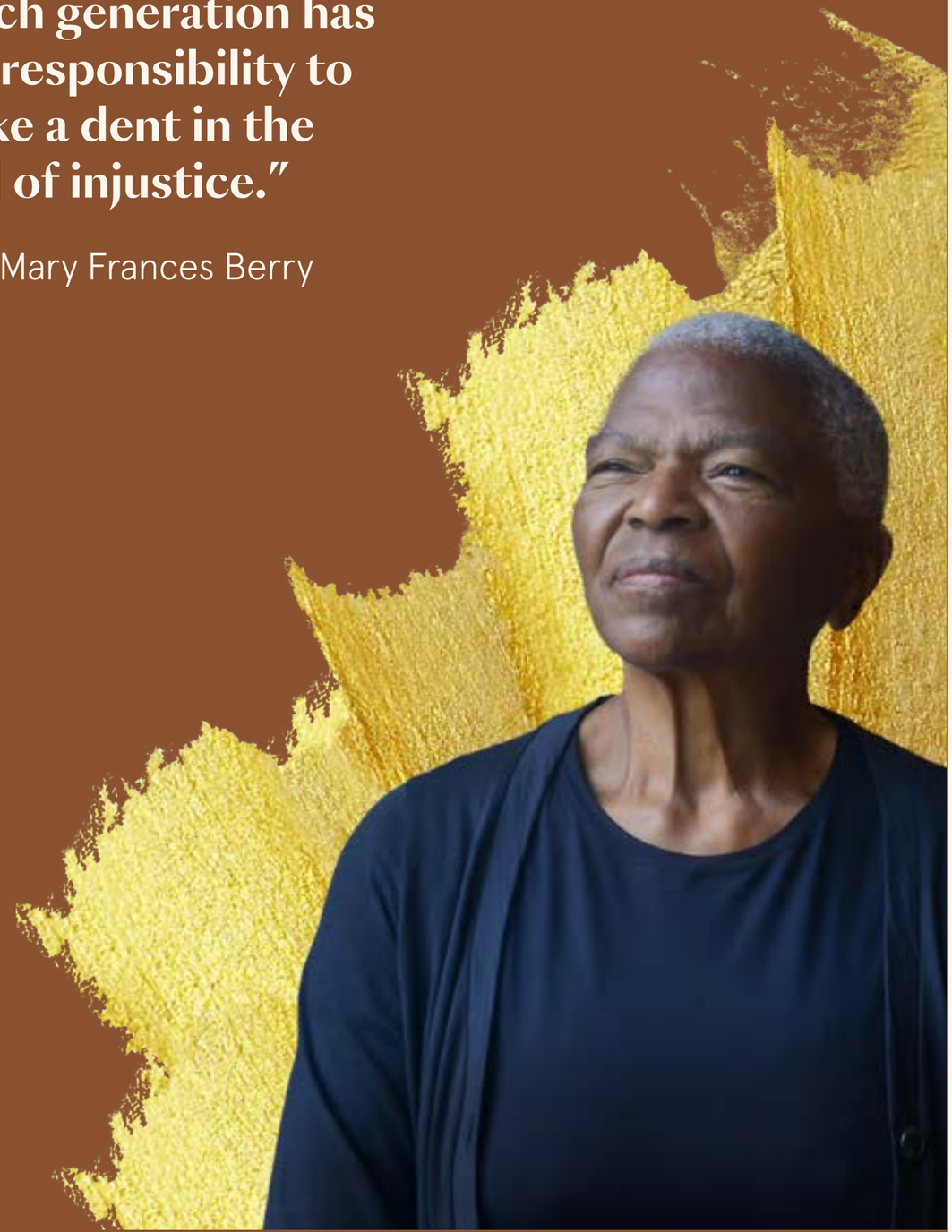
“Each generation has the responsibility to make a dent in the wall of injustice.”

– Dr. Mary Frances Berry



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FOREWORD:
WHO'LL PAY REPARATIONS ON MY SOUL?

By Dr. Mary Frances Berry

For a brief moment, when the world could not turn away from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the brutality of George Floyd's murder, it seemed we might finally be setting ourselves on a path of repair. Instead, three years later, the violence of white supremacy continues. From Buffalo to Jacksonville, Black people are still being hunted down simply for existing, the true history of slavery is being banned from schools, and narratives of Black criminality continue to fill our airwaves.

At the heart of this report is the role of building narrative power to usher the movement for reparations forward. Narrative, as a strategy, when employed correctly, can move people to action. The stories of Black people—our people—and what happened to them, who they were, what could've been of their lives if not for slavery, and what is still possible for their descendants are the stories we must tell.

When done right, narrative can explain better than any kind of data or statistics the stories of our people. Narratives about Black history impress people, enabling them to feel the pain of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the anguish of the families that were destroyed, and the torment of racism that has traversed Black communities for centuries. Our freedom is bound up in narratives that can inspire and push us toward collective healing and repair. This is a consequential moment; we are at the precipice of transformative change, the movement for reparations has reached a height it's never reached before, and momentum is on our side.

Across the country, individuals and private institutions—as well as state and local governments—are starting to address systemic and institutional harms that linger from slavery. It is now all of our responsibility to compel the federal government to do the same.

Throughout this report, you'll see the word "hope" mentioned in various places—it is a trait of the Black struggle for liberation and a tool that has motivated our people in times of distress. It is our hope that has driven change in this country. We've had hope at every turn, and we should have **hope for reparations now.**

As Isaac Newton said, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction—trouble is never over yet. We must be aware of the fight on the horizon that will be waged by the same people who brought reverse discrimination suits regarding affirmative action in higher education. They will use the same tactics to target the movement for reparations. We must not ignore that nor let it discourage us from our ultimate goal.

This is why our stories and narratives are so important. We have to continue to remind this nation of how Black hope has come to fruition, how Black hope has been stepped on, and how our people have always kept on. We must not forget that freedom is a constant struggle.

We must ask who will pay reparations on our souls?

The topic of reparations is not an actuarial activity of adding up the labor extracted from formerly enslaved people. While that is important—and has been done—there has been an immense psychological trauma and loss that no amount of money will ever make whole. There have been familial opportunities lost. We don't know what those families would've done with their lives but we know what they couldn't do. All of this has to play a role in the narrative of reparations.

I don't know who will pay reparations on my soul.

But, I do have hope that this modern movement for reparations will carry the torch forward.

Mary Frances Berry, historian, author, Chairperson of the United States Commission on Civil Rights 1993-2004.

PREFACE

The Reparations Narrative Lab launched in August of 2022 after a year of strategic planning and interviews with experts and advocates across the growing narrative change and reparations ecosystems. Over the course of the last year it has brought together 13 brilliant champions across the racial justice movement to build a narrative schematic that we've dubbed the Narrative House.

The Narrative House was constructed through months of discussion with Lab members, longtime advocates in the reparations movement, allies, cultural strategists, artists, and researchers. It invites all to participate in this movement, particularly those interested in using the power of story to help situate reparations for Black people in the United States as a necessity in creating a just and equitable world.

This movement is necessary because it aims to address two crucial aspects: the current economic precarity that millions of Black Americans find themselves in due to systemic exploitation of labor and capital, and the deep-seated psychological, social, cultural, and political harm Black communities have endured for centuries.

Passing a comprehensive federal reparations program will require building and sustaining narrative power, which we define as the ability to tell stories that shift the mental models and cultural mindsets that define our cultural norms. We believe that shifting the anti-Black paradigms that litter our society will elevate all people.

The Lab and the Narrative House, together, are an attempt at building this kind of narrative power by fostering a type of radical alignment across movements that can advance a progressive racial justice agenda and eclipse the array of anti-Black narratives that block our collective liberation.

As we seek to build power around a set of transformative narratives and stories to uproot anti-Blackness at its core and deliver the promise of reparations to Black people, our opponents are also actively building power, passing harmful policies, and reframing critical pieces of history to fit within a white supremacist narrative.

In this first year of the Reparations Narrative Lab, we analyzed narratives used to challenge reparations, how those narratives show up daily in movement organizing, the impact they have on our collective memory, consciousness, and understanding of race, racism, anti-Blackness, and the inner workings of harmful systems and frameworks like capitalism and colonialism.

The Lab convened conversations with movement leaders on topics like public opinion about reparations over time, white nationalism, the intersection of the Black-led reparations movement, the Japanese-American redress movement, the Indigenous-led Land Back movement, and different cultural strategies that could be applied to modern-day reparations advocacy efforts. We held focus groups with other activists to inform the Lab's thinking as it created the narrative schematic and strengthened partnerships with professional storytellers and content creators who already had a vested interest in using their platform to uplift stories and messages about reparations.

Throughout the process, we strived to honor the wisdom and knowledge of those who have produced thought leadership in the realm of social movements, organizing, power-building, history, and sociology. In one of our first sessions, movement elders like Makani Themba, Dr. Akinyele Umioja, and Dr. Mary Frances Berry helped to orient Lab members of the trajectory of the reparations and broader Black liberation movements, and put into context how we arrived at this current moment in time. We found among us there was both knowledge that affirmed existing assumptions and hypotheses as well as new learnings we hope can support storytelling initiatives in the future.

Reparations is one of the most defining issues of our time. While this report does not provide a landscape of all the efforts going on across the country, dozens of state and local governments and public institutions are exploring what reparations for slavery and its vestiges could look like in their locality.

In this report, we outline various considerations that should be taken into account when discussing reparations for organizers, activists, social justice organizations, artists, researchers, and anyone committed to the ethos of equity, justice, liberation, and freedom. We provide a detailed schematic that can be used to help foster internal conversation, ideation, and creativity within groups, resulting in more voices joining the reparations movement and telling stories alongside us that can truly transform society.

INTRODUCTION:

A WORD ON NARRATIVE & REPARATIONS

"Little progress is made if we transform images without shifting paradigms, changing perspectives, ways of looking."

—bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*

The United States is built on anti-Black narratives.

The stories we tell about race, about Blackness, help inform our entire worldview about life—they construct the mental models that guide our behavior, laws, policies, and social norms. It is through anti-Black narratives, which asserted that African people were subhuman, that the institution of slavery was justified and upheld for centuries.

The abolition of U.S. chattel slavery and the brief era of Reconstruction did not bring an end to anti-Black narratives. In fact, they were altered and repackaged to substantiate an apartheid state through the rule of Jim Crow laws. This gave rise to the largest carceral state in the world where Black people now make up 38 percent of people in prisons and jails despite composing only 13.6 percent of the population.[1] It also created an environment conducive to white vigilantism and state-sanctioned violence against Black people.

These anti-Black narratives follow Black people throughout their lives, from birth to death, and are apparent in every aspect of our society. It is why Black children are four times more likely to be suspended from school than white children[2] and why formerly incarcerated white men are more likely to get a job than a Black man with no criminal record.[3] It's also why Black women

[1] Wessler, Mike. "Updated Charts Provide Insights on Racial Disparities, Correctional Control, Jail Suicides, and More." Prison Policy Initiative, May 19, 2022.

[2] Toppo, Greg. USA Today. 'Black Students nearly 4x as likely to be suspended.' USA Today, June 7, 2016.

[3] Von Zielbauer, Paul. New York Times. "Race a Factor in Job Offers for Ex-Convicts." The New York Times, June 17, 2005.

are three times more likely to die during childbirth than white women.[4]

At the same time that federal, state, and local policies helped grow white wealth, there were laws enacted that either helped to extract from or block Black wealth, which has created what long-time reparations organizer Nkechi Taifa calls the "racial wealth chasm." Today, the average white family has ten times as much wealth as the average Black family. [5]

Entertainment, educational, political, and cultural institutions in the United States have not only created the aforementioned disparities but also continue to sustain and reinforce them through a matrix of related stories that shape how all people view Black communities. Stories regarding race have mostly served to degrade, dehumanize, or exploit Blackness while framing whiteness and all it encompasses as "normal." The Black-led reparations movement seeks to upend this and radically transform the way in which Blackness and Black people are seen, understood, and accepted.

Doing this will require social justice organizations to reframe common arguments against reparations, create a strong and powerful base of individuals who persistently advocate for reparations, and build enough power to shift white-supremacist and capitalist mindsets that have deemed reparations and other similar policies as radical or unobtainable. We'll have to align around a set of narratives while organizing across communities to motivate our elected officials to ultimately introduce and pass reparations policies at the local, state, and federal levels.

Increasing support for reparations among all groups will require changing not only the stories we tell about reparations, but also about racism, anti-Blackness, colonialism, white supremacy, and the history of this country. It will require us to shift these stories from the current harmful ones—so many of which are based on outright lies and myths—to those that are cohesive, honest, and transformative. We believe this will only happen through an intentional and coordinated narrative and cultural change effort.

The Narrative House, along with this report, serves as an invitation to join the reparations movement and build power alongside old and new organizers. Our vision is for the Narrative House to be utilized as a tool by racial and social justice organizations to support their efforts in building the internal capacity needed to expand the movement. The more organizations that align on a cohesive narrative will allow us to radically grow our "choir," fortify our "base," and move those who are "persuadable" closer to our side (see graph, p. 23). This will foster an environment conducive to the passage of a comprehensive federal reparations bill.

We also hope that artists, cultural makers, and creatives, who use their platforms or art forms to influence our understanding of race, racism, and white supremacy will use the Narrative House in support of their creative direction and artistry. It is through the saturation of these narratives within our culture that we will normalize reparations as a requirement to create a racially just world, and it is through organizing and building power around these narratives that we will secure a base of supporters for this movement.

The report's title is inspired by the science-fiction writer Octavia Butler who noted that "there is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns." Over time, we have witnessed decolonial movements that have transformed our way of being and produced a new society that looks and feels radically different than the one it discarded. The reparations movement, in coordination with other liberatory and decolonial movements across the globe, has the potential to transform the world—to give rise to a new sun.

We hope the Narrative House and the research from the Lab laid out in this report will inspire you to join or participate further in the movement for reparations. What follows is truly an invitation to craft your own individual and organizational narratives, build power alongside the organizers carrying forth these narratives every day, and support the creation of a new and much more liberated world.

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[4] Taylor, Jamila, Bernstein, Anna, Waldrop, Thomas, Smith-Ramakrishnan Vina. "The Worsening U.S. Maternal Health Crisis in Three Graphs." The Century Foundation. March 2, 2022.

[5] McIntosh, Kriston, Moss, Emily, Nunn, Ryan, Shambaugh, Jay. "Examining the Black-White Wealth Gap. Brookings. February 27, 2020.

KEY TERMS

Liberation Ventures uses the following definitions to describe the various terms used in this report. These definitions do not necessarily reflect the definitions used by the Lab members or the organizations they represent.

MOVEMENTS:

Sustained groupings that develop a frame or narrative based on shared values, that maintain a link with a real and broad base in the community, and that build for a long-term transformation in power.[6]

NARRATIVE:

A collection of stories we tell each other, rooted in shared values and common themes that uphold a particular frame or worldview.

NARRATIVE POWER:

The ability to tell stories that shift the mental models and cultural mindsets that define our cultural norms.

NARRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE:

The network of relationships and organizational systems needed to create dominant narratives and build narrative power.

NARRATIVE WEAVING:

An intentional effort to weave narratives and relationships between and within different movements and social identities.

NARRATIVE CHANGE:

An intentional effort to shift the stories that guide our values and shape how we make meaning of information and experiences. As narrative practitioner Brett Davidson notes, "narrative change rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative and that in order to bring about change in the world, we need to pay attention to how this takes place. Narrative change can involve a change in the set of narratives that are used, a change in the prevalence of a narrative, or both."[7]

NARRATIVE HOUSE:

A schematic designed to help organize the different deep narratives, stories, messages, core narratives, and areas of opportunity that build toward a narrative north star on a particular topic and/or social movement.

[6] Rhonda Ortiz and Manuel Pastor, Making Change: How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them. University of Southern California. 2009.

[7] Davidson, Brett, The role of narrative change in influencing policy. On Think Tanks. July 20, 2016.

POETRY INTRO:
OUR INHERITANCE

By: Trevor Smith

"Poetry is that process which through word, image, myth, love, and humor establishes me at the living heart of myself and of the world."

—Aimé Césaire, Poetry Is/and Knowledge

We arrive on this Earth,
Fresh out the canals,
With an inheritance.
The curves of our mothers' smile,
The twinkle of our fathers' eye,
The soft chuckle of our grandfathers' laugh,
We inherit.
The imprints of our grandmothers' hands,
The softness, the hardness.
We inherit,
Collective memories,
Littered with hard fought battles and spirits, and customs, and stories, to guide us.
We inherit,
A sense of freedom, dancing on the tip of our tongues,
We inherit all of the good,
All of the bad,
All of the in between,
We inherit all of it.
We are not the first and most certainly not the last,
To inherit a debt.

So, if we,
Out the womb,
Nuzzled in infancy,
Unaware of the world in front of us,
Inherit all of these things,
Then what do we,
As a society,
A 400-year-old constellation of stars,
Inherit?
Logic would presume
If we inherit the dirty money of our forefathers,
Then we inherit both the dirt and the money,
The blood which spilled to create it,
The destruction deployed to sustain it,
This reality cannot be divorced from our royalties,
No.

We inherit the pain and suffering,
The lashes,
Upon lashes,
Upon lashes,
Upon lashes.
The famous last words,
"I cannot breathe,"

Muttered through centuries.
If we inherit the ideals of this foundation,
Then we inherit its sins
Buried beneath it
Breathing life into it,
We inherit.
The word "nigger,"
Scribbled on garage doors,
Driven out of the mouths,
Of young and old.
We inherit
The beating hearts,
Of runaways,
Dreaming of a chain-less life.

In this world, some of us inherit privilege,
In this world, some of us inherit hardships,
In this world, all of us inherit a history of harm,
It is our story,
We must tell it,
It is our song,
We must sing it,
We must claim it,
And most importantly,
We must repair it.
After all,
As "Americans,"
This is our inheritance.

THE RNL APPROACH:
LEARN, CREATE, BROADCAST, IMMERSE

"To change our frames is to change all of this."

—George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant*

The Reparations Narrative Lab is built on the four pillars that racial justice leader Rashad Robinson named as necessities in creating a strong narrative infrastructure: the ability for organizations and movements to learn, create, broadcast, and immerse narratives within society.[8]

Within the context of the Lab, each pillar represents a critical function that will eventually support the reparations movement in an ongoing way.

The Reparations Narrative Lab seeks to provide organizers, researchers, artists, strategists, and other movement actors across not only the reparations movement but also the racial justice movement at large an opportunity to learn, train, co-create, and experiment with qualitative and quantitative data.

Specifically, each pillar seeks to accomplish the following:

Learn: Enable shared learning about successful and unsuccessful narrative change strategies in other social movements, audience segmentation, theories of narrative change and culture change, and the current narrative landscape.

Create: Catalyze creative content, art, activations, projects, installations, and interventions uplifting the transformative narratives we need to broadcast and immerse.

Broadcast: Utilize traditional mediums such as print, radio, and TV, our own organizational platforms, and the platforms of allied organizations, to broadcast the narratives we need to popularize throughout society.

Immerse: Saturate U.S. culture with our ideas—across movies, sports, food, fashion, religion, art, and beyond—to immerse new narratives and change the way people think and feel about reparations.

[8] Robinson, Rashad. Changing Our Narrative About Narrative.

Specifically, each pillar seeks to accomplish the following:

01

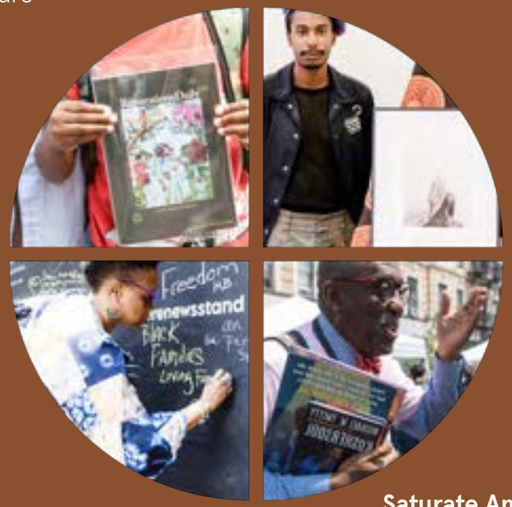
LEARN:

Enable shared learning about successful and unsuccessful narrative change strategies in other social movements, audience segmentation, theories of narrative change and culture change, and the current narrative landscape.

02

CREATE:

Catalyze creative content, art, activations, projects, installations, and interventions uplifting the transformative narratives we need to broadcast and immerse.



03

BROADCAST:

Utilize traditional mediums such as print, radio, and TV, our own organizational platforms, and the platforms of allied organizations, to broadcast the narratives we need to popularize throughout society.

04

IMMERSE:

Saturate American culture with our ideas -- across movies, sports, food, fashion, religion, art, and beyond -- to immerse new narratives within our culture and change the way people think and feel about reparations.

The first year of the Lab focused on the learning and creating levers and we plan to activate the broadcast and immerse levers of the Lab as our work grows and progresses.

In our first six months with the 13 lab members, we sought to deeply understand the audiences we seek to reach, the narratives that stand in the way of our success, and the various framing tactics currently used throughout the movement. The second six months of the Lab was dedicated to creating the Narrative House schematic and testing how we might use it as a tool in the future through partnerships with storytellers.

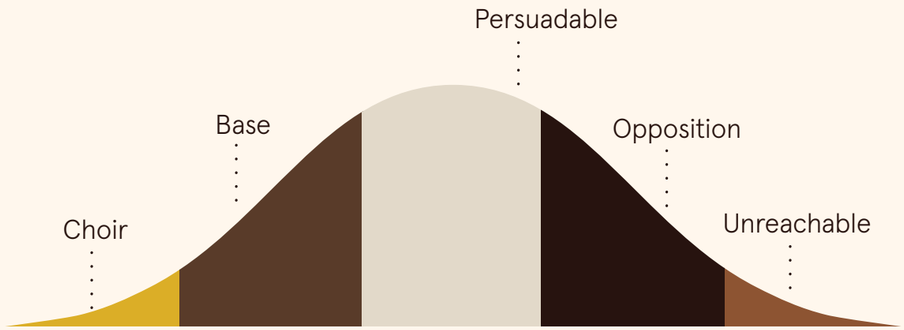
The report follows the same sequence that the Lab underwent. The next section summarizes some of the key learnings that emerged from the first year, followed by the most popular arguments against reparations—what we call narrative roadblocks—and then finally, the articulation of the Narrative House and how we used it to create content in coordination with artists and storytellers.

What we learned

In the first six months we focused on better understanding our choir, identifying our target audiences and how we reach them, and what specific narratives get in the way of securing reparations. We partnered with Harmony Labs, a media research lab that uses data science to deliver insights on audiences. They supported us in identifying story opportunities and challenges across the reparations landscape.

Each lab member came into the Lab with a deep understanding of narrative change (this initial cohort was chosen because of the members' backgrounds in strategic communications, organizing, and/or narrative change strategy). Our discussions touched on a range of topics, including the history of narratives and storytelling in the reparations movement, how to build solidarity

One way to segment audiences -from the Social Change Initiative



Graphic courtesy of the Social Change Institute

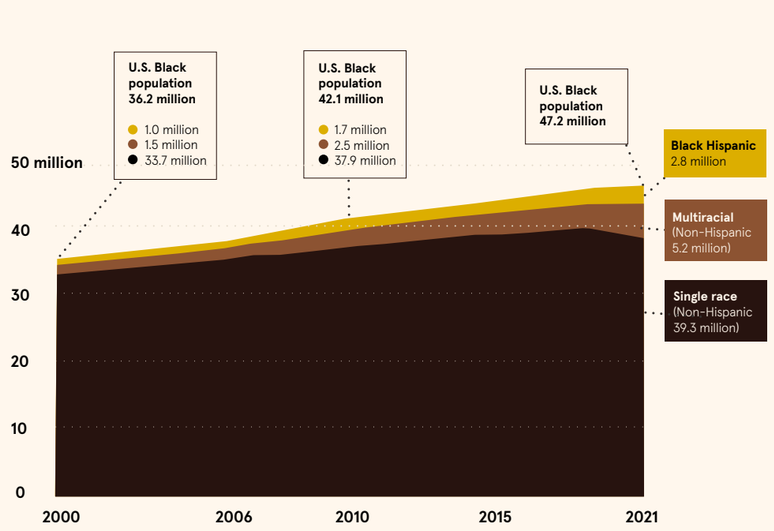
with Japanese-American and Native communities on this issue, and the social psychology of reparations among specific audiences.

The Lab later held a total of seven focus groups to help us understand how and what our choir thinks about reparations and the current narrative landscape, and ultimately, what stories, messages, and narratives might be included in our Narrative House schematic. The focus groups were comprised of other movement actors across justice, equity, and religious spaces. During this phase, a few key learning areas emerged:

Learning 1: Building power within Black communities is a priority.

The majority of the 46.8 million people in the United States who identify as Black are descendants of the people who were enslaved here.[9] Ten percent were born in a different country.[10] However, as we discuss in greater detail later in the report, it will be critical that the reparations movement inspires and activates the millions of Black people across the country—no matter their country of origin, culture, or traditions.

Among the U.S. Black population, both multiracial and Hispanic numbers have grown sharply since 2000



Note, Populations rounded to nearest 100,000. Populations may not sum to total for a given year due to rounding, U.S. Black population" refers to all people who self identify as Black, inclusive of single race Black, multiracial Black and Black Hispanic people. "Single race" refers to people who self-identity as Black alone and do not identity as Hispanic or Latino. "Multiracial refers to people who self identify as Black and one or more races in combination, but do not identify as Hispanic or Latino "Black Hispanic" refers to people who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino and as Black (multiracial or otherwise .Sources: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2000 decennial census (5% (PEWS) and 2006-2019 and 2021 American Community Surveys (PEWS).

Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

[9] Greenwood, Shannon. "The Growing Diversity of Black America. Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. March 25, 2021.

[10] IBID

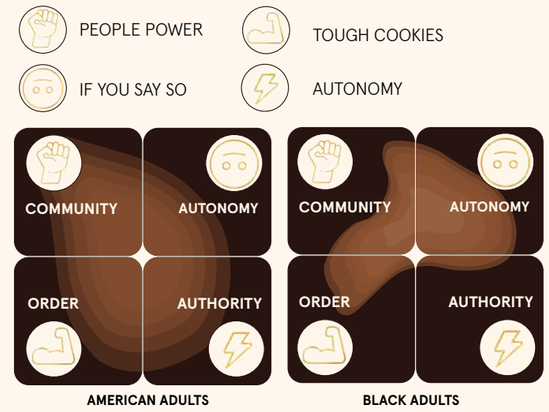
Thus, Lab members agreed that although there is a growing number of people who are not Black who support the movement and a multi-racial force is necessary for the transformation we seek, our work begins with educating and building power among and across Black communities on the issue of reparations. As a Black-led movement, Black people have to be empowered to articulate what the reparations movement is and what reparations policies may look like on a local, state, and federal level.

Because Black people are not a monolith, we set out to understand Black communities as a diverse audience segment. Harmony Labs defines an audience as a group with distinct attitudes and cultural affinities that participate in distinct media cultures. Like Harmony Labs, we understand that racial, gender, and other identity-based demographics are just one aspect of what makes up an audience.

Our research began by looking at where Black people in the United States are located within Harmony Labs' values-based audience map, which they divide into four quadrants: People Power, If You Say So, Tough Cookies, and Don't Tread On Me. Each of these segments has a distinct and primary cultural value, respectively: community, autonomy, order, and authority.

These values, according to Harmony Labs, can be thought of as basic psychological goals that inform how people engage with social issues.[11] As you can see from the graph below, most U.S. Black adults are in the community, autonomy, and order cultural segments and are less likely to be in the authority cultural segment. From a storytelling perspective, we believe this recognition will help organizers, artists, and researchers better reach Black people across the array of advocacy, content, and research priorities that are evident throughout the movement.

Below we discuss Black People Power, If You Say So, and Tough Cookies. Because few Black people fall within the Don't Tread on Me segment, we don't dive deep into that category in this report.

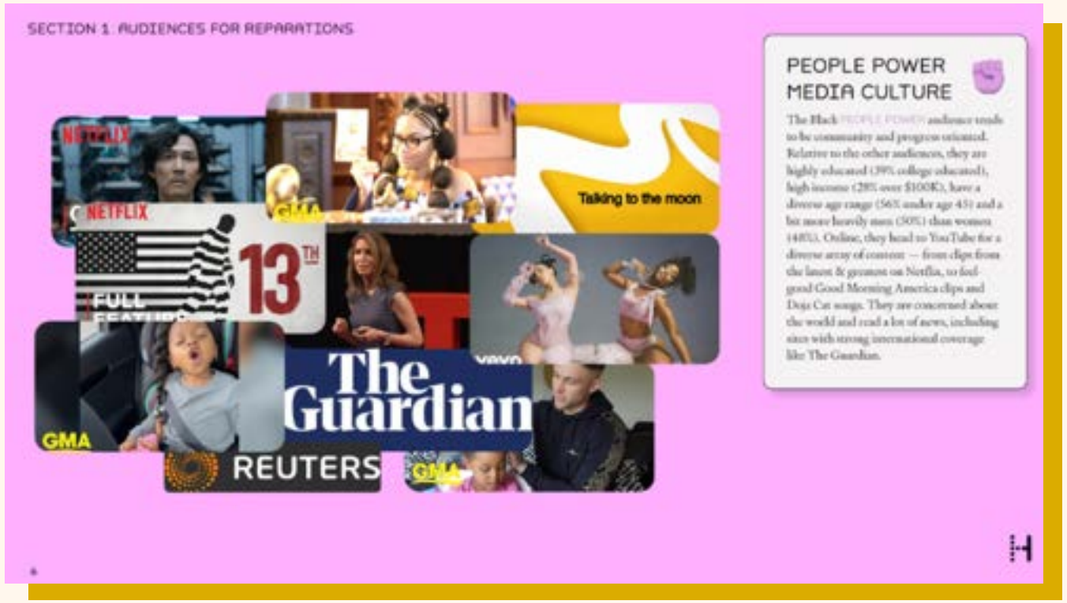


Most Black people fall within the community, autonomy, and order cultural segment

[11] Narrative Observatory.

BLACK PEOPLE POWER (COMMUNITY)

The map below represents the plurality of Black audiences in each U.S. county with a Black population of 500 people or more—organizers on the west coast, and particularly in California, who are trying to reach Black people will generally be talking to the People Power segment, whose primary value is community. The majority of people in this segment live in coastal areas, are between the ages of 18-44 (56 percent under 45), mostly identify as women, have completed either some college or have a college degree (39 percent), read a lot of news and watch info-rich documentaries, and make between $50,000-$150,000 a year (28 percent over $100k/yr).



This segment also values equity and has a strong concept of universalism, meaning they are concerned for all people regardless of the other communities with which they self-identify. Those who fall under the People Power segment may find community in various ways that exist distinctly in the Black community, as well as outside of it. For example, in Harmony Labs' research on narratives related to health equity, they found that the People Power segment was the audience that was most likely to care about people they may not know and the audience most likely to engage with content that centered on systemic racism.[12]

When considering how to engage this segment through storytelling, it will be crucial to portray reparations as an opportunity to uplift and strengthen Black communities. Equally important is the need to construct narratives that situate reparations and the reparations movement as a pathway to a greater sense of belonging. This is particularly important because reparations are often framed through a scarcity lens and can sometimes exacerbate divisions within the Black diaspora further. This type of framing will most likely ostracize Black people who fall under the People Power segment.

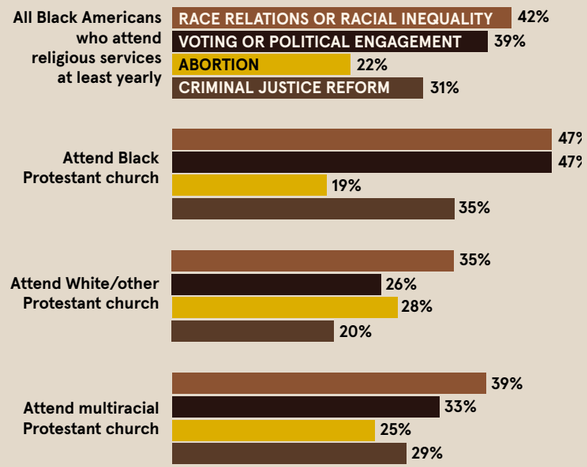
While focusing on framing that strengthens and connects Black communities, additional cultural research needs to be done to understand what other social identities are most prevalent within the Black People Power

[12] Narrative Observatory Health Equity Narratives: Content Testing & Strategy Validation. Jan 2023.

segment. History has shown that Black churches, mosques, and other religious institutions have served as prominent and critical spaces for civic engagement and organizing within Black communities—and that 60 percent of religious Black folks attend all-Black congregations.[13] A 2021 Pew study found that almost half of those who go to Black Protestant churches heard a sermon on racism, race relations, or racial inequality, and 31 percent heard a sermon on criminal justice reform.[14]

Almost half of those who go to Black Protestant churches say they have heard sermons on racism

Among Black Americans who attend religious services at least a few times a year, % who heard a sermon, lecture or group discussion in past year about...



Source: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

While that study did not have data on reparations as a topic of conversation within Black churches, we can presume that it is a relatively under-discussed topic across institutions. Telling the story of reparations in places where Black people are already organized (religion, sports, music, neighborhood groups, etc.) will be critically important in not only reaching Black People Power segment but all Black communities.

[13] Mohamed, Besher, Cox Kiana, Diamant, Jeff, Gecewicz, Claire. Faith Among Black Americans. 2021.

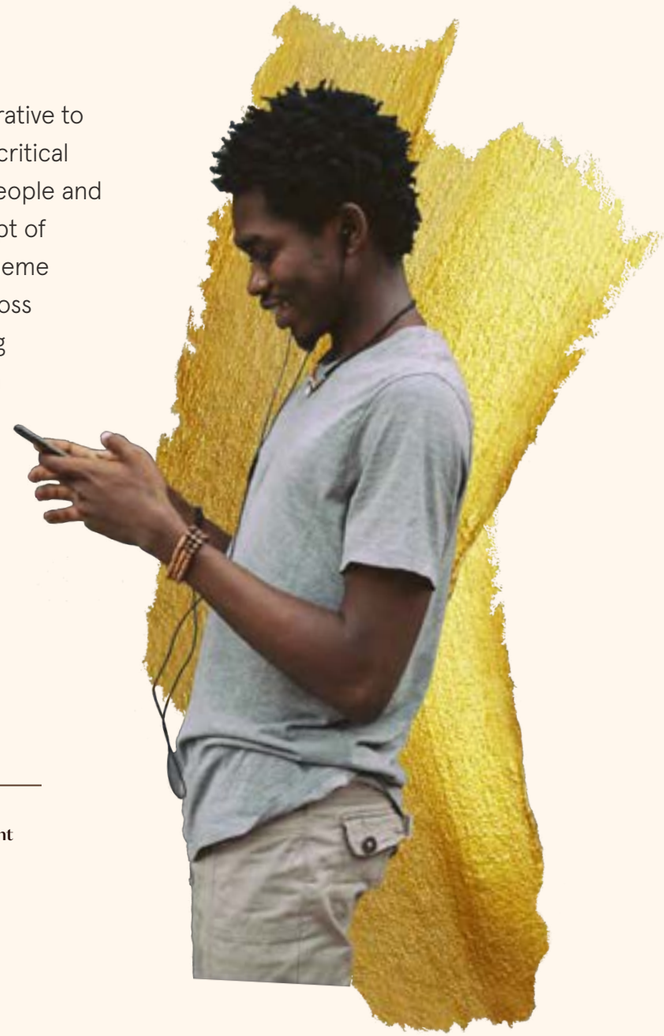
[14] IBID

BLACK IF YOU SAY SO (AUTONOMY)

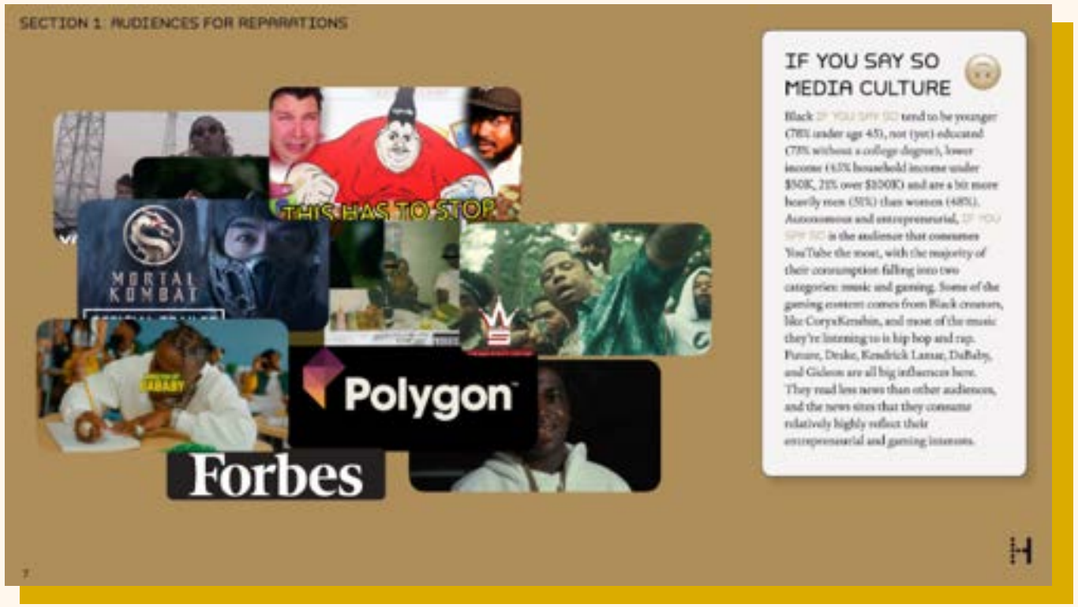
The segment of the Black population that primarily values autonomy, the If You Say So group, is scattered across the country, unlike the others which are situated in specific regions. They tend to be younger in age, with over 75 percent of this segment falling under the age of 45, generally having lower income, and embracing autonomous and entrepreneurial values.

When reaching this segment, it will be imperative to uplift the notion of self-determination as a critical aspect of reparations that will allow Black people and families to thrive independently. The concept of self-determination has been a consistent theme throughout Black liberation movements across the globe.[15] As articulated by leaders ranging from “Queen Mother” Audley Moore, Martin Luther King Jr., Nkechi Taifa, and more recent organizations like the Movement for Black Lives, a large aspect of repairing Black communities must also encompass restoring power to communities so they can govern themselves.

Despite the push for progress in Black political representation since the end of



[15] Taiwo, Olufemi. Reconsidering Reparations: The Movement for Black Lives and Self-Determination. 2019



Reconstruction, there have only been five Black people (all men) who have served as state governors and 11 Black people (nine men) who have served as U.S. senators.[16] When Black communities were thriving, like those in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Richmond, Virginia; or Syracuse, New York, they were either burned down by white mobs or destroyed by urban renewal projects.[17] Because of this history, this segment in particular—and many in Black communities in general—may believe that even if reparations were made possible, the United States, either through policy or vigilante violence, would seek to trample on any progress toward self-determination that Black people would make.

It's important then to lift up the inspiring historical stories, such as those of the Republic of New Afrika (RNA), a Black nationalist social movement group that has had a lasting impact on the modern-day movement for reparations. The RNA's political goal was the creation of a sovereign state that would encompass parts of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The former two states were included in Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's Special Field Order No. 15, which designated 400,000 acres of land for redistribution to newly freed Black people. Also lifting up stories of cultural reclamation or perseverance, such as stories of the Gullah/Geechee people who are situated along the coast of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida and still hold strong to customs, languages, and foods from West Africa, can reiterate the importance self-determination.

Additionally, stories uplifting post-colonial success on the continent of Africa may be supportive in helping to inspire, encourage, and activate this segment of the Black population on the issue of reparations. Taking what Georgetown University professor and scholar Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò calls the constructive view of reparations—which situates reparations not only as a backward-looking project that seeks to repair past harm but also as a forward-looking one that seeks to construct a new just world—could be a successful tactic in reaching this segment of the Black population.

This will require providing organizers and storytellers with the tools to elevate international stories that have employed pillars of decolonization and transitional justice, a concept the International Center for Transitional Justice defines as how "societies respond to legacies of massive and serious human rights violations."[18] Across the African continent, from Ghana to South Africa to Mozambique to the Ivory Coast, there are powerful stories of independence and liberation efforts that are largely kept out of U.S. classrooms. These stories will be critical in influencing reparations campaigns across the United States.

Reaching the If You Say So segment of the Black population will require a more nuanced and strategic cultural strategy than is typically employed throughout nonprofit or philanthropic spaces. This group is consistently consuming content on Youtube that falls into two major categories: music and gaming, often listening to the most popular artists in hip-hop and rap, including Future, Drake, Kendrick Lamar, and others. Artists such as Beyonce, Vic Mensa, Chance the Rapper, and Saba are just a few Black artists who have referenced reparations in their music. Going forward, it will be critical to bring these artists into the movement so that the matter of reparations is not simply mentioned in their music but is a larger part of their brand and personal identity.

[16] Karimi, Faith. In the Nearly 232-year history of the US Senate there have only been 11 black senators. CNN. 2021.

[17] Chaplin, Lanessa. Horwitt, Fay, Smith, Trevor, Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood wasn't America's only Black Wall Street. June 2020.

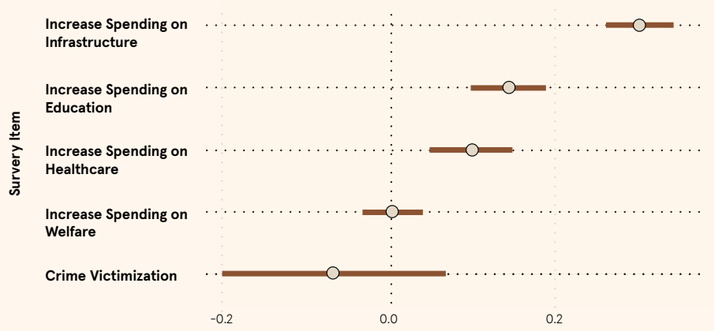
[18] International Center for Transitional Justice, "What Is Transitional Justice?" accessed December 2022.

BLACK TOUGH COOKIES (ORDER)

Across the country, we found that the Black Tough Cookies/order segment tend to be more represented in Southern states and tend to skew on the older side, with 71 percent of this segment being at least 45 years old or older. Important to this group are family, faith, hard work, and a sense of order and rules.

Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and subsequent racial uprisings—the largest this country has ever experienced—there were loud and resounding calls to defund police agencies across the country and increase investments in community infrastructure that would support Black and other historically excluded communities. However, Gallup Poll surveys from that same year found that 61 percent of Black people wanted police presence to remain the same in their neighborhoods.[19] Another 2020 survey from YahooNews/YouGov found that 50 percent of Black respondents felt that we need "more cops on the street," despite the fact that 49 percent of Black people cited they feel less secure when they encounter a police officer.[20] Concepts of order, particularly within a protect-and-serve structure that has violently dominated Black people, are particularly delicate to hold and understand.

Black survey respondents don't just want more police, they want more support for their communities in general.



Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Study (2016-2018) sample of 13,557 Black respondents weighted to be nationally representative. **Note:** Shaded region represents region for which we 95% confident that the true correlation

These data points don't tell the full story about what Black people think about the police and the larger concept of law and order. Decades of underinvestment in predominantly Black communities, coupled with decades of racial profiling and targeting through initiatives like the War on Drugs, have left most Black people with few options when it comes to considerations about order. The framing of this issue often leaves communities feeling like they have two options: increased police presence or increased violence in their communities.

The above graph plots the association between increased spending on social safety net programs and law enforcement. It finds that Black people who support increased spending on law enforcement are also more likely to support spending on infrastructure, education, or healthcare -the issue at hand here is not necessarily that Black people want to see more police in their community, but rather we can't imagine a world without police.[21] As abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba notes in a *2020 New York Times* op-ed calling for the abolition of police, "We should redirect the billions that now go to police departments toward providing health care, housing, education, and good jobs. If we did this, there would be less need for the police in the first place."[22]

When trying to reach the Tough Cookies segment, we may likely face many of the same challenges that the movement to defund the police faced in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's death. Since order as a value is important to this segment of the Black population, it will be imperative to tell stories that situate reparations as a way of reconstructing a new type of order that will substantially benefit all Black people.

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[19] Saad, Lydia. Black Americans Want Police to Retain Local Presence. August 5, 2020.

[20] Yahoo! News Race and Politics, You Gov Survey. June 11, 2020.

[21] Mazumder, Shom. What Black People Really Think About the Police. The New Republic. December 2020.

[22] Kaba, Mariame. Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police. New York Times. June 12, 2020.

Learning 2: Framing can significantly alter support for reparations.

In one of the first Lab sessions, we engaged in a conversation with Cornell University Doctoral candidate Mikaela Spruill who has been conducting research alongside Dr. Amy Krosch, social psychologist and Assistant Professor at Cornell University examining the psychological barriers to reparations. Spruill and Krosch's research suggests that when discussing reparations with white Americans, support is more likely when the proposal doesn't directly involve monetary compensation to recipients but instead includes policies such as education or housing subsidies. According to Spruill, "there is something specific about adding a monetary component to a reparations package that drives down white American support for this policy."

This aligns with similar research conducted by Dr. Thomas Craemer who found that people were less likely to oppose reparations when considering monetary compensation if financed via corporations rather than the federal government (or from individual white families), when directed to the descendants of formerly enslaved people, or when given through symbolic (apology) or other non-cash forms (educational benefits).[23]

Other research found that asking white people about supporting reparations to Black Americans before asking them questions about supporting reparations to Japanese-Americans increased opposition to reparations for Japanese-Americans (showcasing how anti-Blackness harms all communities of color).[24]

A part of Spruill and Krosch's research investigated whether attributing racial disparities to slavery increased support for reparations and to what extent did Black and white Americans support reparations for victims of police brutality—such as the case of victims of police torture in Chicago. One of their major findings was that both white and Black Americans supported financial and non-financial forms of reparations for those who were the victims of police brutality over reparations for slavery. Their 2019 results predated the public lynching of George Floyd and subsequent racial uprisings. They replicated their study in 2021 and saw that support across the board for reparations for those who are the victims of police brutality was even higher, and the gap for support on reparations between Black and white Americans had significantly lessened.

While reparations advocates across the country and organizers who participated in the first phase of the Lab are clear that reparations must begin by accounting for the harm inflicted during slavery, as these findings suggest, it will be strategic for our movement to link reparations to modern-day harm.

[23] Craemer, Thomas. Framing Reparations. Policy Studies Journal. April 28, 2009.

[24] Dawson, Michael. Popoff, Rovana. Reparations: Justice and Greed in Black and White. Du Bois Review.. March 11, 2004.

Context, daily news, and social moments all play a substantial role in public understanding and the continuous shaping of narratives about reparations for Black people. But anti-Black harm, which has existed throughout the history of the United States, and the various social identities within the country complicate the matter. A paper published in 2021 that details white American attitudes and support toward reparations for slavery found that "white women are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to oppose financial payments."[25] The authors, Dr. Ashley Reichelmann and Dr. Matthew Hunt, hypothesized that white women's financial status is typically more precarious than white men, and therefore are more likely than white men to buy into zero-sum narratives. In other words, white women perceive themselves as potentially losing economic security if Black people were to receive reparations.

To address the malleability of support for reparations, it will be necessary to develop a comprehensive and cohesive understanding of reparations for Black Americans can benefit society at large. Additionally, it's essential to paint a clear picture of what the future may look like as the journey toward reparations begins.

In a survey that Liberation Ventures conducted in 2021, we found that providing participants with a more detailed and thorough explanation of the financial and non-financial aspects of reparations significantly increased support for the policy.[26] As we noted last year in a YES! Magazine opinion article titled, *On the Other Side of Reparations, a New World Awaits,* we believe this indicates that addressing the information gap by detailing specifically what reparations could look like may help people see themselves in the world that organizers are actively building.[27]

Learning 3: There is a disconnect between the problem of structural racism and the solution of reparations.

In June 2020, a few weeks following the police-killing of George Floyd and a few months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which particularly wreaked havoc on Black communities, a Pew study found that 67 percent of the population in the United States either strongly or somewhat supported the Black Lives Matter movement.[28] Support for BLM over the last two years has disappointingly dropped to now only 51 percent of people in the United States supporting the movement.[29]

[25] Reichelmann,Ashley. Hunt, Matthew. White Americans' Attitudes Toward Reparations for Slavery: Definitions and Determinants. Race and Social Problems. September 3, 2021.

[26] Liberation Ventures. August, 2021. Draft Survey Data.

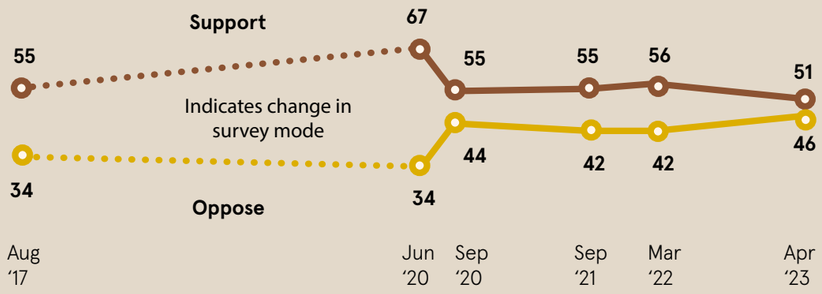
[27] Smith, Trevor. Florant, Aria. On the Other Side of Reparations, a New World Awaits. Yes! Magazine.

[28] Horowitze Menasce Juliana, Hurst, Kiley, Braga, Dana. Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement has Dropped Considerably From its Peak in 2020. Pew Research. June 14, 2023.

[29] IBID

Support for the Black Lives Matter movement is down from a year ago

% saying they strongly or somewhat the Black Lives Matter movement



[Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. The 2017 survey was conducted by telephone; all others used the Center's online American Trends Panel.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 10-16, 2023.
Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement Has Dropped Considerably From Its Peak in 2020°

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Despite the decline in support (which in some parts can be attributed to targeted attacks on prominent Black movement leaders), there is still a general understanding that anti-Black racism is a structural problem. A 2020 Ipsos survey found that "the majority of Americans (58 percent, and mostly people of color) acknowledge that racism is built into the American economy, government, and educational system."[30] A 2022 More In Common survey found that 59 percent of people in the United States believe that the country needs to more publicly acknowledge the wrongs of earlier generations.[31]

Nevertheless, there is a clear and concerning disconnect between seeing reparations as a viable solution to that harm. Anti-Blackness, which scholar Dr. Michael Dumas defines as a "cultural disregard and disgust for Blackness," is one culprit of this disconnect.[32] Every contour that makes up our social imagination is infected with the virus of white supremacy or as Dumas describes, "the very technologies and imaginations that allow a social recognition of the humanness of others systematically exclude

[30] Ipsos. Most Americans agree that institutional racism is real and that change is needed. September 3, 2020.

[31] More in Common. American Identity Project. Americans' Attitudes toward Reparations and American History. October 2022.

[32] Dumas, Michael. Against the Dark: Antiblackness in Education Policy and Discourse. Theory into Practice, 55:1, 11-19,

59%

of Americans believed that the United States needs to more publicly acknowledge the wrongs of earlier generations.

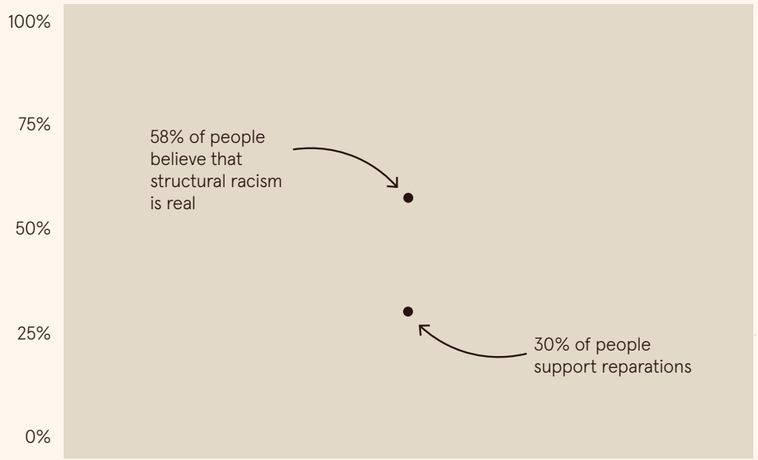
Source: More In Common

this possibility for the Black."[33] As we'll delve into further in the following section, the stories that fuel anti-Blackness create the environment for a slew of narratives that are perpetuated and used to deny Black advancement on a daily basis.

As noted in a 2021 report from the Insight Center for Economic Development and Duke University, *Still Running Up the Down Escalator: How Narratives Shape Our Understanding of Racial Wealth Inequality,* "anti-Blackness calls into question the deservedness of Black Americans and undergirds policies that marginalize and disproportionately punish them."[34] A large driver of this disconnect is the notion that Black people are undeserving of repair. For Black people, it's easy to grasp why direct and targeted forms of repair to a community that has been systemically harmed makes sense—for the rest of the country less so.

It will be critical in our storytelling, advocacy, and organizing to seek to address this disconnect and frame reparations as one solution, within a suite of other solutions, to the problems that exist due to the nation's history of racial injustice.

Twice as many people believe in structural racism as support reparations



Data from October 2022 Harris Poll; 2020 Ipsos/NPR Poll; 2023 Liberation Ventures Polling Roundup

[33] IBID

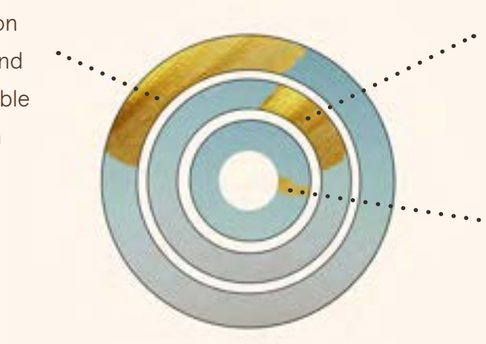
[34] Hicks, Natasha. Addo, Fenaba. Price, Anne. Darity Jr, William. Insight Center for Economic Development. Samuel DuBois Cook Center on Social Equity. 2021.

Learning 4: There are plenty of stories about race, very little about reparations throughout the media.

In the tradition of organizations like the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) and the Movement for Black Lives, we sought to understand and frame reparations as a solution that will impact all Black people in the United States, regardless of their genealogy. Building on the *Beyond Demography: Black Audiences Online* report published in 2020 by A/B Partners and Harmony Labs for their Win Black campaign, we sought to understand how communities, particularly Black communities, understand and experience reparations in their cultural lives in order to support our Narrative House schematic.

The 2020 report found a few critical data points that supported thinking about our research priorities, including:

Black audiences spend 23 percent of their time on Google and Youtube and they spend nearly double the amount of time on Youtube compared to Facebook.[35]



Black audiences spend 10 percent of their Youtube time listening to or watching music videos[36]

Similar to most people in the United States, Black audiences spend just one percent of their online time reading the news.[37]

These data points provide a few potential implications and takeaways for a broader narrative strategy related to reparations. When thinking about how we reach Black audiences (and all audiences), we must think beyond the tactics that social justice organizations typically employ. While communication functions within organizations and throughout movements are important, as the *Beyond Demography* report highlights, the majority of people in our communities are not getting their information from print and digital news outlets.

A 2014 study from the Media Insight Project found that six out of 10 people read nothing more than a news headline a week.[38] While these articles are generally considered wins within social justice spaces, they are most certainly not the only tool we should be focused on using in order to grow public support for reparations.

In our research with Harmony Labs, we found that stories about race are prevalent across media platforms, particularly on television, both entertainment and news broadcast. On an average day, 50 percent of tv watchers are consuming some sort of race-related content. The exploration of race on film and TV have come a long way over the past 50 years in large part due to the increase of Black actors and news anchors taking a more prominent role on our TV screens. When Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, a film starring the late Sidney Poitier that follows the story of a young interracial couple, was released in 1967, interracial marriages had only been made legal five months prior. Today, race-relevant content, whether positive or negative, has become a larger part of our cultural discourse, and it will be imperative for the movement to explore how to tie the issue of reparations to our collective understanding of the construction of race and racism in this country.

Black audiences specifically are consuming a diverse array of race-related content ranging from stories about Black leaders like Malcolm X to stories about Black history dating back to 1492. In their analysis for the Lab, Harmony Labs analyzed over 370,000 pieces of media across platforms that were specifically about race and over 1,800 that were specifically about reparations. Using statistical models they were able to find areas or centers of gravity where media content most specifically appealed to different Black audiences. For instance, stories that were more focused on popular culture appeared more prominently for different Black audiences compared to stories about federal

[35] Beyond Demography: Black Audiences Online. June 2020.

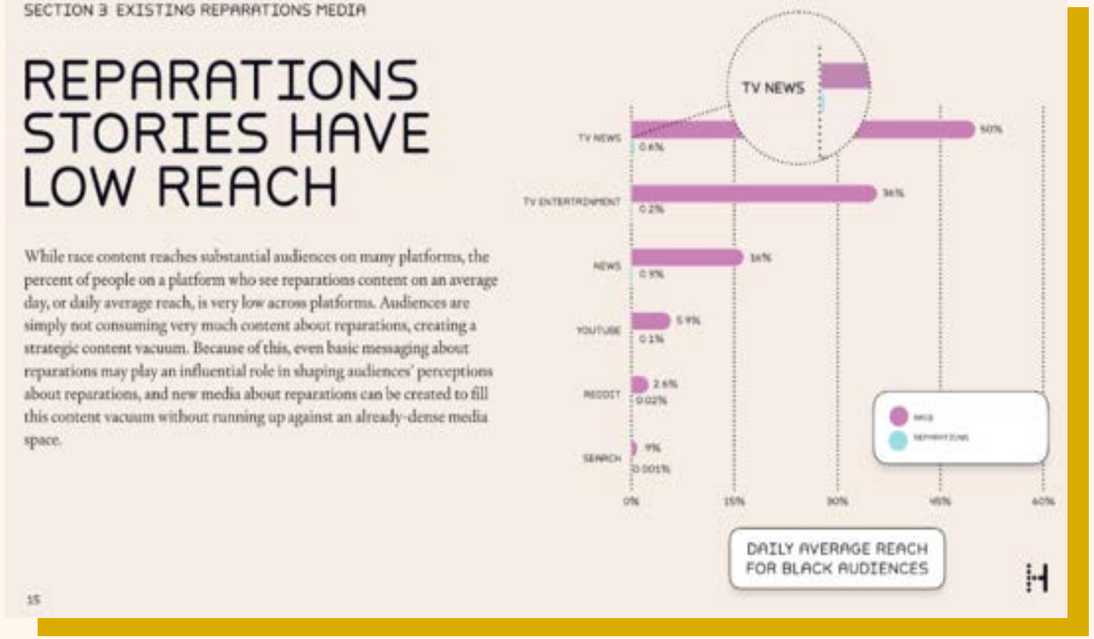
[36] IBID

[37] IBID

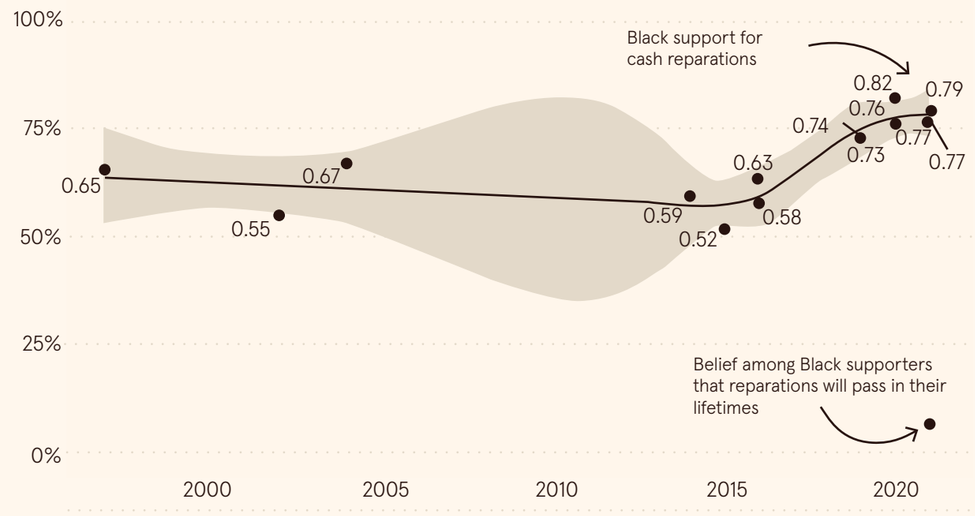
[38] "How Americans Get Their News." American Press Institute. March 17, 2014.

topics, and these stories were consumed at different rates by different audiences.

While race-related stories take up a good amount of space in our general cultural discourse, stories about reparations reach far fewer people. The percentage of people who see or consume reparations-related content on a daily basis is less than one percent across platforms, which leaves audiences with little context or points of view on the topic. This, of course, is a significant issue that the movement faces, particularly because the topic of reparations for Black people in the United States is so nuanced, complex, and intertwined with so many other issues including the economy, American history, gender violence, and political disenfranchisement to name just a few. Harmony Labs found that even basic messaging about reparations may play an influential role in shaping audiences' perceptions about the topic. A significant gap exists in the narrative surrounding reparations and its multifaceted implications. Therefore, it is imperative for the movement to strategically engage and assert their voices in discussions concerning race and structural racism, while tying the story of reparations as a solution to these issues (within a broader racial and economic justice agenda).



Support for reparations among Black people has grown sharply in recent years. However, only 7% of Black people that support reparations believe they are extremely or very likely to happen in their lifetime



Learning 5: A "hope gap," exists within Black communities.

A 2022 Pew survey that examined public perception on reparations found that only seven percent of Black people who support reparations believe they are extremely or very likely to happen in their lifetime.[39] This is in stark contrast to the over 77 percent of Black people who support reparations in some way.[40] We call this the "hope gap," and it is one of the first problems that we must address as we work to build a more visible and transformative narrative on the topic of Black reparations.

Hope, as Dr. Berry alluded to in the foreword, is a complicated matter within the Black community. Black people are arguably the most hopeful people in this country (we delve into this much further in the next section of the report). It is through the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of Black people that this country has managed to inch closer to its stated ideal of democracy. Further understanding of what drives the hope gap, and more importantly, what stories and narratives might close it, will be critical in our efforts to pass reparations at the federal level.

[39] Blazina, Carrie, Cox, Kiana. Pew Research Center. "Views of Reparations for Slavery in Us Vary Widely by Race and Ethnicity. November 28, 2022.

[40] IBID

RESEARCH ON THE HORIZON

There is still a plethora of messaging, communications, framing, and narrative-related research needed to be conducted in the reparations space including:

OPPOSITION RESEARCH

We must get a much stronger grasp of our opposition—who they are, what messengers they rely on, what narratives they uplift (we start to hypothesize on this through our narrative roadblocks), and how effective they are at moving people, particularly the people we hope to influence, to their side.

PSYCHOGRAPHIC AUDIENCE RESEARCH

We will build on the Harmony Labs segments that we were provided and get a more nuanced understanding of our core audiences, particularly the racial worldviews they employ when understanding matters like reparations, affirmative action, or other reparative policies. It will be imperative to continue to understand what motivates and moves these audiences on these topics, how they are influenced in the world, what they value, and how best to reach them.

FRAMING RESEARCH

As we've outlined above—and go into more detail further in the report—we know that support for reparations is malleable depending on how much information audiences are given and the frame through which that information is shown. We have started to test, and will want to continue testing, what frames move what audiences, and how effective certain messengers are at moving different audiences. We'll also want to explore what increases hope, particularly within the Black community, in our attempt to close the hope gap, and how effective the different parts of the Narrative House are at increasing public support for reparations.

PUBLIC OPINION/PERCEPTION RESEARCH

It will be imperative to capture the public's perceptions on reparations in an ongoing manner. We will want to understand how the public defines reparations, what specific policies Black communities want from a reparations process, how understandings of anti-Blackness and structural racism are shifting from year to year, how prevalent the narrative roadblocks we've named are in society, and the public's understanding of racial history in the United States.

ANTI-BLACKNESS, THE HOPE GAP, & TEN NARRATIVE ROADBLOCKS:

What Stands In the Way of Reparations

"This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life changes, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery."

- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

Anti-Blackness as a Site of Harm

According to historian Saidiya Hartman, slavery created "a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone."[41] The cascading effects of slavery have not only impacted Black social, economic, political, and cultural life, but they've also situated Black communities as the unreformable "other." This narrative, Black people as the "other," is core to the anti-Black attitudes and behaviors that all non Black people who enter and live within the United States inherit.

Anti-blackness as a cultural mindset is elevated through an anti-Black media system and solidified by anti-Black policies and institutions. The individual prejudices toward Black people coalesce within a system of laws and cultural norms to create the structure that upholds white supremacy.

[41] Hartman, Saidiya. Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route. 2007.

The impact of these stereotypes have no boundaries. From childhood, Black people are perceived as a threat.

A 2014 study found that, beginning at the age of 10, Black children are perceived to be less innocent than children of other races in every age group, and that Black children's ages are overestimated by an average of 4.5 years, meaning that Black children as young as 14 can be viewed as adults.[42] This supports the findings that Black children across socioeconomic levels are more likely to be suspended than white students.[43] A 2021 study found that 26 percent of the Black students analyzed in a dataset received at least one suspension for a minor infraction compared to just two percent of white students.[44]

A field experiment conducted in New York City by the late sociologist Dr. Devah Pagar and her colleagues, Dr. Bruce Western and Dr. Bart Bonikowski, found that across hundreds of applicants for entry-level jobs, Black people were half as likely to receive a callback or job offer as similarly qualified white applicants and that Black men with no criminal record fared no better than a white man who was just released from prison.[45]

When hiring managers were asked why they tended to avoid hiring young Black men, they often said they believed the entire racial group was "lazy," "unreliable," or lacked the skill or motivation to succeed in the job.[46] The researchers also found that these perceived individual shortcomings were rooted in both first-hand experiences with Black employees and media representation of Black people. Since employers already were operating from a biased standpoint because of negative perceptions of Black men, even their direct experiences were likely colored by their own biases. Economists have noted that this form of discriminatory treatment can have an immense amount of negative effects on the labor market.[47]

While the constant display of explicit anti-Black tropes of the 18th and 19th century have dissipated, anti-Black undertones still permeate our society and influence global perceptions of Black people. They are so entrenched that even when faced with physical evidence to the contrary, many will still believe them. For example, a 2017 study asked participants to rate Black and white men based on their weight, height, strength, and build. They found that participants consistently judged Black men to be larger, stronger, and more muscular than white men, even though they were the same size.[48]

[42] Goff et al. The essence of innocence: consequences of dehumanizing Black children. February 24, 2014.

[43] Walsh, Richard. Why, Really, Are So Many Black Kids Suspended? EdWeek.

[44] Toro, Del Juan. Wang, Ming-Te. The roles of suspensions for minor infractions and school climate in predicting academic performance among adolescents. American Psychologist. 2021.

[45] Pager, Devah, Western, Bruce, Bonikowski, Bart. Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment. American Sociological Review. October 1, 2009.

[46] Moss, Philip. Tilly, Chris. Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skilly, and Hiring in America. 2001.

[47] Goldsmith, Arthur. Hamilton, Darrick. Darity, William Jr. Shades of Discrimination: Skin Tone and Wages. The American Economic Review. May 2006.

In the opening statements for the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former police officer who killed George Floyd by pressing his knee into the back of his neck, Chauvin's lawyer stated, "you will see that three Minneapolis police officers could not overcome the strength of Mr. Floyd. Mr. Chauvin stands five foot, nine inches, and 140 pounds. Mr. Floyd is six-three and weighs 233 pounds."[49] This statement exemplifies the old trope that Black men have superhuman strength, and was used in an effort to absolve Chauvin of his actions; it showcases how racialized perceptions have created an atmosphere that allows police officers to play judge and jury with a person's life.

Black women's experiences with anti-Blackness are particularly felt in both the realms of the labor market and maternal healthcare. In 2021, the CDC estimated that the Black maternal mortality rate was 2.6 times higher than that of white women.[50] These disparities, according to public health experts, originate from "the deep roots that American gynecology has with anti-Black racism."[51]

As the scholar Dr. Michael Dumas stated in a 2016 paper, there has been no "clear historical moment in which there was a break between slavery and acknowledgment of Black citizenship and Human-ness."[52] Modern perceptions of Black people, borne through racist stories and narratives, serve only to dehumanize Black people further and negatively influence the social behavior of white people, particularly those chosen to uphold power.

It is important to understand anti-Blackness as core to U.S. economic, political, and cultural experiences, because it undergirds all of the specific narratives detailed in this section that create a barrier to achieving reparations for Black people. Anti-blackness surrounds us in everything we do and communicate. Eradicating it, then, must be a critical aim of any reparations effort seeking to repair the harm done to Black people.

Examining the "Hope Gap" in Black Communities

Hope, according to Mariame Kaba, is a discipline. It's a feeling that is experienced in moments of yearning and visioning where what's on the horizon is more beautiful than current reality and a daily practice of optimism, even when oppressive forces seem to be ever present.

Black people in the United States and across the globe have every reason to feel hopeless

[48] Wilson, John Paul, Hugenberg, Kurt, Rule, Nicholas. Racial Bias in Judgments of Physical Size and Formidability From Size to Threat. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 2017.

[49] Reuters. Opening statements at trial of ex-Minneapolis police officer in George Floyd's death. March 29, 2021.

[50] Brangham, William. Dubnow, Shoshana. American Black women face disproportionately high rates of maternal mortality. PBS. June 28, 2023

[51] Dayo, Elizabeth. Christy, Kayonne. Habte, Ruth. Health in colour: black women, racism, and maternal health. December 10, 2022.

[52] Michael J. Dumas (2016) Against the Dark: Antiblackness in Education Policy and Discourse, Theory Into Practice, 55:1, 11-19, DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2016.1116852

in the midst of the anti-Blackness that exists around them. From vicious acts of violence to broken promises and daily microaggressions.

In the United States, it has almost become an annual tradition for a self-avowed white supremacist to commit a violent mass-murder on an unsuspecting Black community. In 2015, a white man walked into Emanuel African Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina and took the lives of nine Black people. In 2022, a white teenager walked into a Tops Friendly supermarket in Buffalo, New York and took the lives of 10 Black people. In 2023, a white man walked into a Dollar General store in Jacksonville, Florida and took the lives of three Black people. These vicious acts of violence are reminiscent of the 1963 church bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama by members of the KKK, where four Black girls all under the age of 16 were killed.

When you couple this extreme violence with the centuries of broken promises made to Black communities it is surprising that Black people have any hope or faith at all. In his acceptance speech after winning the 2020 Presidential election, President Biden lauded Black communities by noting that as a voting bloc, Black people have always had his back, and that he would therefore have theirs. These words echo broken promises of past administrations, both Republican and Democrat, that have run on lofty promises to pass policy that could finally bring about a more racially equitable society. However, the economic and political reality most Black people face tells a completely different story- regardless of which party is in office.

Add to that the fact that Black people face a society that consistently tells them that their experiences with racism and anti-Blackness are unreal, which contradicts the reality that most Black people come to understand from an early age. For instance, one study found that Black children are aware of a range of racial stereotypes by the time they are three years old.[53] Another study conducted in 2014 asked Black children to list the stereotypes they've heard about Black people and found that 27 percent of ten-year-old Black children listed stereotypes about Black criminality, such as associating Black people with jail, and 43 percent listed stereotypes about Black hyperviolence, such as Black people being more prone to shoot, kill, and steal.[54] This hyper-awareness of racism makes it obvious why only seven percent of Black people believe

[53] Najdowski, Cynthia. How the "Black Criminal Stereotype Shapes Black People's Psychological Experience of Policing: Evidence of Stereotype Threat and Remaining Questions. 2023. University of Albany.

[54] Hines Shelvin, K, Rivadeneyra, R, & Zimmerman, C. Stereotype threat in African American children: The role of Black identity and stereotype awareness.

reparations are very likely to happen in their lifetime.

Though the seven percent remind us why hope is a discipline. It is a practice that we must cultivate, nurture, and attend to within Black and other oppressed communities. "It's work to be hopeful," according to Kaba, "you have to actually put in energy, time, and you have to be clear-eyed, and you have to hold fast to having a vision."[55]

Closing the hope gap on reparations will require a methodological and organized storytelling and powerbuilding approach rooted in a shared vision. As Hirokazu Miyazaki, a professor of anthropology at Northwestern University describes, in his book *The Method of Hope,* which examines the relationship of hope within Fijian culture, hope is a "deeply grounded method of knowledge that demands of us a radical temporal reorientation of knowledge."[56]

There is little capacity across society, according to philosopher Maxine Greene, "to look at things as if they could be otherwise." In other words, we lack a collective radical social imagination to conjure up a new reality for ourselves. We must realize that we have the ability to deconstruct many of the social constructs that we have created. There is great potential in a creative, cross-movement, intersectional narrative strategy grounded in hope - one that paints a vision of a world where anti-Blackness and all other forms of discrimination do not exist. This vision is entirely possible and within our control.

Perhaps, we should conceptualize our most progressive modern-day movements and agendas—reparations, abolition, Land Back, defunding the police, universal healthcare, guaranteed income, and open borders—as mechanisms to redistribute hope. It is these movements and agendas that will bring us as close as possible to an equitable society.

Storytelling will play a critical role in inspiring Black people specifically to see themselves in the reparations movement and then play an active role in pushing it forward in their daily lives. There exists a stubbornness in that seven percent of Black people who currently know reparations are likely to happen in their lifetime. A stubbornness existed within enslaved Africans to hope for a day that they'd discard their shackles. There must exist a stubbornness within us to reinfuse our movements with the discipline of hope so that we can make clear that reparations are possible in this lifetime.

[55] Hope is a Discipline: Mariame Kaba on Dismantling the Carceral State. The Intercept. March 17, 2021.

[56] Miyazaki, Hirokazu. The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijuan Knowledge. October 11, 2006.

NARRATIVE ROADBLOCKS

A roadblock is a specific type of obstacle—one that is usually set up by some type of authority. The roadblocks we identified were mostly created by white men yielding their authority to enact an overarching ideology of white supremacy—the notion that those with white skin have an inherent biological or cultural superiority over other racial groups.[57]

White supremacy not only leads to inequitable racial and economic outcomes, but also produces and normalizes a form of hegemonic emotional domination—meaning that the feelings and emotions of white people are also positioned to maintain a racial hierarchy.[58] According to sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, whether consciously or unconsciously, white people "participate in various ways in maintaining racial order, and hence, on occasion, derive a degree of satisfaction from enforcing racial boundaries."[59]

The roadblocks we identified for this report present different narratives that maintain or enumerate the various counter-arguments against reparations for Black people here in the United States and around the world. These narratives cut across racial and economic lines and reinforce neoliberalism, racial liberalism, and white supremacist attitudes and behaviors. A radical culture shift, one that seeks to eradicate these narratives throughout society and replace them with new narratives that can instill a culture rooted in altruism, love, abundance, healing, and justice, is our charge. These roadblocks were compiled through months of deep conversation among the 13 lab members and an analysis of the focus groups we held with others throughout the reparations movement based on the conversations they have or observe on a daily basis through their reparations advocacy.

This list, of course, could be longer—there are a suite of narratives rooted in anti-Blackness, domination, imperialism, capitalism, and colonialism that are not included in the list below. In addition, there is overlap between some of the roadblocks and many that are subsets of other larger cultural mindsets. For example, we felt it necessary to name the inflated notion of racial progress as its own narrative roadblock while also naming "the too long ago/too complicated narrative," which is closely tied to the narrative of racial progress. While these two roadblocks intertwine and overlap, they show up differently and oftentimes divorced from each other in arguments against reparations.

The goal of compiling these roadblocks is to give anyone, no matter their background or knowledge of reparations or race-related policy, an understanding of the most typical arguments used against reparations to Black people. We believe it's important to start to name these roadblocks across our movements, and start to connect and weave together the ways in which we can collaboratively overcome them.

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[57] Clair Matthew, Denis, Jeffrey. Sociology of Racism. Harvard University.

[58] Matias, Cheryl. Feeling White: Whiteness, Emotionality, and Education. February 19, 2016.

[59] Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. Feeling Race: Theorizing the Racial Economy of Emotions. January 11, 2019.

NARRATIVE ROADBLOCKS

01

Meritocracy & Bootstraps Narrative

Definition: The notion that anyone, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class status, can make something of themselves if they work hard enough.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: This is one of the strongest narratives held in the United States – engrained by the story of the "American Dream." This ideal was fostered by values espoused by the country's "founding fathers," like Thomas Jefferson who believed in "democratic egalitarianism," the notion that "all men are created equal," (despite the fact that Jefferson enslaved 600 humans through the course of his life). Intertwined with the idea of meritocracy is the belief in individualism, a value enshrined through the Bill of Rights which guarantees us "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness." Individualism and capitalism go hand in hand.

How does it show up in our stories today?: The "American Dream," is a phrase that was coined during the Great Depression by historian James Truslow Adams. Adams described it as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone."[60] The American Dream theme shows up repeatedly in Hollywood movies like *Wolf of Wall Street* or *The Pursuit of Happyness* where actor Will Smith plays an entrepreneurial but houseless single father trying to break into corporate America. We also have seen it in recent policy and legal debates around higher education and affirmative action like the recent Supreme Court decision to end "race-conscious" affirmative action programs. Masked as a story about ambition, the story of the American Dream actually helps cement racial and economic inequity—as economists like Raj Chetty have provided data that shows the dream (having better economic success than that of your parents) is out of reach for many Americans regardless of their race.[61]

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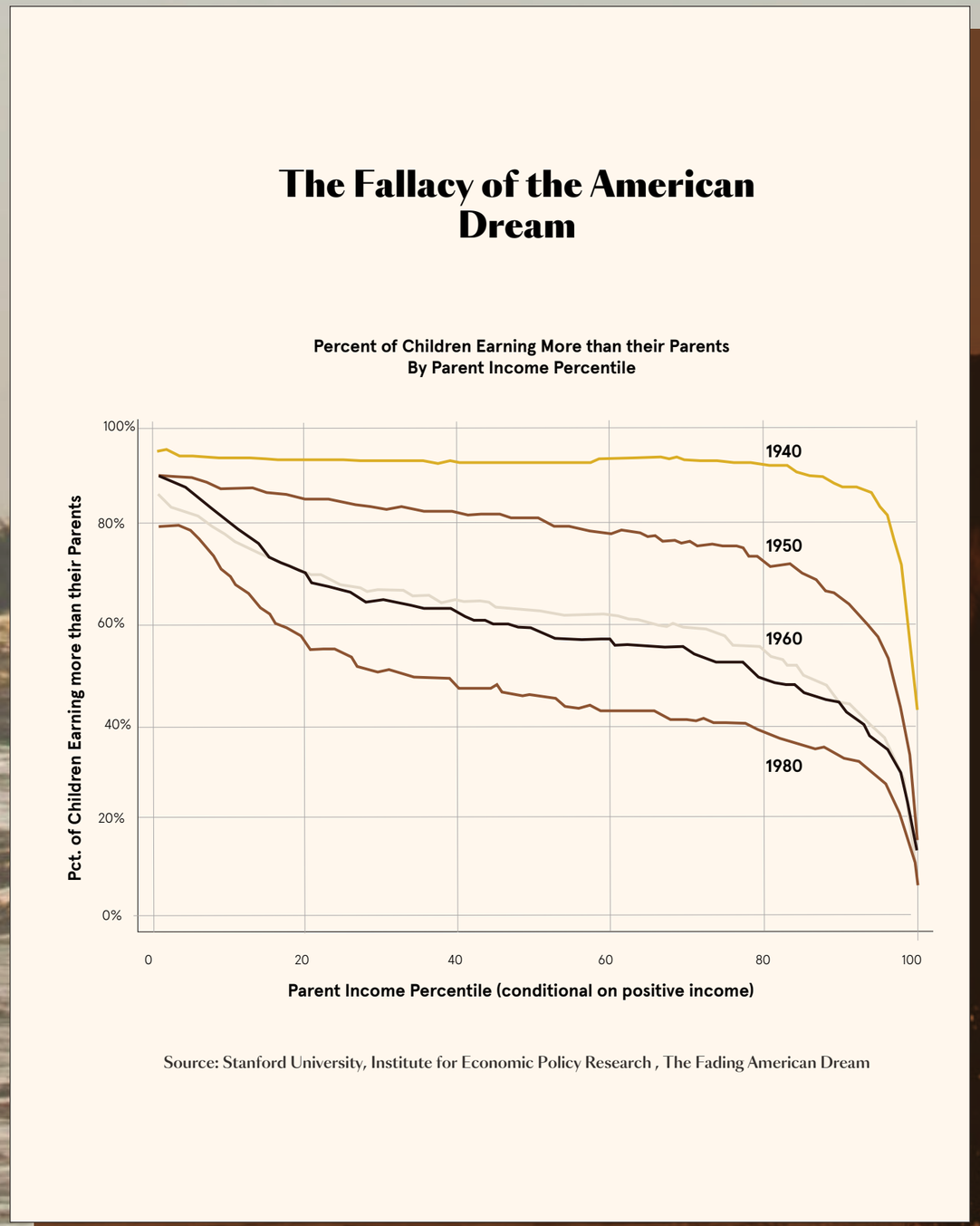
[60] Leonhardt, David. The American Dream, Quantified at Last. New York Times. December 8, 2016.

[61] Badger, Emily. Cain Miller, Claire, Pearce, Adam. Quealy, Kevin. Extensive Data Shows Punishing Reach of Racism for Black Boys. March 19, 2018.



02

Racial Progress Narrative

Definition: The notion that the United States has made far more progress on racial issues than it actually has.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: Scholars dating back to W.E.B. DuBois and Frederick Douglass have discussed the country's state of affairs as it relates to racial relations. Current teachings and storytelling about race relations in the United States often draw a straight line from slavery to emancipation and reconstruction to Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, and the election of the first Black president, as evidence that this country has slowly marched toward a racially just society.[62] This "artificial image of progress," as sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva articulates, stems from the rise of the "color blind" ideology that many white Americans adopted in the 1960s and 1970s and some still hold fast to today.[63]

One of the first usages of "color blind," was used by Justice John Marshall Harlan, in his dissenting opinion in *Plessy v Ferguson*, which initiated the rise of Jim Crow's "separate but equal" laws. In it, he states the U.S. Constitution is "color-blind," and doesn't tolerate "classes" among citizens.[64] He goes on to write, "In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law… The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved."[65] The notion that no person will be judged by the color of their skin is, of course, ideal. In reality, Blackness has always been used as justification for state brutality and subjugation.

[62] Onyeador et al. Disrupting Beliefs in Racial Progress: Reminders of Persistent Racism Alter Perceptions of Past, But Not Current, Racial Economic Equality. August 20, 2020.

[63] Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America. June 9, 2017.

[64] Plessy v Ferguson. May 18, 1896.

[65] IBID.

How does it show up in our stories today?: In response to accusations about racism or anti-Blackness, white people often retort that they "don't even see color." In a CNN interview with Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, after a video of racial discrimination at a Starbucks in Philadelphia went viral, Schutlz stated "as someone who grew up in a diverse background as a young boy in the projects, I didn't see color as a young boy, and I don't see color now."[66]

Not only does this sentiment contradict itself (Schutlz states that he grew up in a diverse background, but somehow still doesn't see color), it is divorced from the racial reality and history of the United States. Stories and rhetoric about race and racial identity have always existed in the United States since its founding. The Declaration of Independence itself describes those Native to this land as "merciless Indian savages," and many of the drafters of the Declaration enslaved people because of the color of their skin.[67]

We also see conservative politicians twist the words of Martin Luther King Jr., in his infamous "I Have a Dream" speech, where he stated that he longs for the day his children will "one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Proponents of the racial progress narrative often ignore the systemic and structural ways racism still impacts Black people and instead focus on the interpersonal racism that King and others throughout the Civil Rights Movement worked to end (though of course it still remains).

A 2020 paper authored by a group of sociologists argues that the dominant narrative of racial progress "may keep Americans fairly ignorant, albeit willingly in many cases, to the current state of racial economic inequality in the nation."[68] In their study, the researchers found that white respondents overwhelmingly thought the gap between Black and white wealth was much smaller than it actually is, finding that "white respondents overestimated average Black-white wealth equality by about 60 percentage points."[69]

[66] Howard Schultz on racial injustice: I don't see color. CNN.

[67] Ostler, Jeffrey. The Shameful Final Grievance of the Declaration of Independence. The Atlantic. February 8, 2020.

[68] Onyeador, I. N., Daumeyer, N. M., Rucker, J. M., Duker, A., Kraus, M. W., & Richeson, J. A. (2021). Disrupting Beliefs in Racial Progress: Reminders of Persistent Racism Alter Perceptions of Past, But Not Current, Racial Economic Equality. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 47(5), 753–765.

[69] IBID.

03

Diaspora at Odds Narrative

Definition: Divisive notions that situate Black people across the diaspora at odds with each other on issues such as race, racism, and immigration.

Context: Reparations are owed to those who are the descendants of enslaved people in the United States and uprooting anti-Blackness is a key component of reparations and therefore affects all Black people. Therefore, we need all Black people to be a part of the reparations conversation. Unfortunately, there are different factions within the racial justice movement, some of which employ toxic notions of nativism.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: The National Black Cultural Information Trust describes "diaspora wars," as "cross-cultural arguments among different ethnicities of African people."[70] Tensions between Black immigrants and Black Americans are not new—a 1994 ethnographic study found a "great deal of tension between foreign-born and American-born Blacks in both the working-class and middle-class worksites."[71] The narratives that have emerged from these tensions have led to both groups to engage in stereotyping of one another–and according to sociologist Benjamin Aigbe Okonofua, there are four reasons why these tensions exist:

- U.S. social categorization of Blackness, much of which is rooted in a white supremacist ideology of the "one-drop" rule, groups African immigrants with one another and with Black Americans, despite markedly different lived experiences, language, and culture. [72]
- African immigrants have a different understanding and relationship to their ancestry, which according to Okonofua "potentially generates hostility between both groups."[73]

[70] National Black Cultural Information Trust. Understanding Diaspora Wars.

[71] Waters, Mary C. Ethnic and racial identities of second-generation black immigrants in New York City. 1994. International Migration Review.

[72] Okonofua, Benjamin Aigbe. "I am Blacker Than You": Theorizing Conflict Between African Immigrants and African Americans in the United States. August 1, 2013.

[73] IBID.

- A perception of limited resources and a need to compete for them.
- Each group engaging in the "othering" of the other.

To reiterate, this narrative roadblock and the tensions that arise from it did not originate from either African immigrants or Black Americans. Instead, it has formed and morphed out of the ideologies of colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism—structures that undergird all of the roadblocks named in this report.

A lack of historical context about the ways in which white supremacy has aided in tension throughout the African diaspora, and the stripping of an African identity from many Black Americans, has also aided the narrative that Africans themselves practiced slavery and were involved in the slave trade, which often flattens or leaves out significant context of slavery on the African continent. This narrative is rooted in European colonial thinking and was used as a justification for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the first place.[74]

There are fundamental differences in how Europeans understood the word "slavery" and the practice of what Basil Davidson, a journalist and historian who focused on African history and politics, explained more resembled serfdom, where individuals were often in possession of individual rights.[75] Herbert Foster, a writer and historian, argued that "the confusion of African serfdom or villeinage with New World slavery was perpetuated despite many accounts by contemporary observers to the contrary."[76] In 1859, President Lincoln sent Martin Delaney, a Black man, to Africa as part of the National Emigration Convention of Coloured Men, where Delaney proclaimed that "it is simply preposterous to talk about slavery, as that term is understood, either being legalized or existing in this part of Africa. It is nonsense. The system is a patriarchal one, there being no actual difference, socially between slaves and the children of the person with whom they live."[77]

On the complexity of the narrative that Africans sold themselves into slavery, reparations advocate Jessica Ann Mitchell Aiwuyor points out, "some of the same kingdoms folks

[74] Foster, Herbert J. Partners or Captives in Commerce? The role of Africans in the Slave Trade. Journal of Black Studies Journal of Black Studies.

[75] IBID.

[76] IBID.

[77] Delaney, Martin R. Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party. 1861.

pointed out for selling slaves, also fought against the slave trade and lost loved ones."[78] As Foster also points out, "the rulers of coastal Africa struggled against the worst excesses of the slave trade, but it proved too strong for them in the end."[79] Understanding the complexities of this roadblock and disrupting anti-Black narratives both directed toward the African continent and Black people in the United States is critical in our path to liberation.

Despite perceptions, Black people are not each others' enemies. This lack of historical context about colonialism, imperialism, and the insidiousness of the Atlantic Slave Trade is intentional. As author and urban education professor Rosemary Lukens Traore writes, "schools in America for the most part are not designed to educate Africans or African Americans about Africa, their historical and cultural heritage."[80] Traore adds that "schools in Africa, originally set up by the colonial masters, have not been educating the African students about their heritage either. These systems were designed with the same enculturation focus, to civilize the savages by bringing them European history and culture."[81]

How does it show up in our stories today? Platforms like Youtube are burgeoning with videos that describe the tensions between Africans and Black Americans. In just two months a video from *The Cut*, asking Africans and African Americans whether they use the N-word, has garnered over two million views. Conversations about cultural appropriation and inspiration are also constantly in play. Movies like *Coming to America* (and its sequel) have been criticized for misportraying and flattening African culture while Beyonce's extended music video Black is King has been criticized as uplifting a Eurocentric vision of "class exploitation that continues to degrade Black life on both sides of the Atlantic."[82] Conversely, Nigerian Afrobeats star, Burna Boy, recently flippantly suggested that many of the problems Black Americans face are due to the fact they don't have a strong relationship with the African continent.

Overcoming this roadblock and organizing around the understanding that it is the history of white supremacy, colonialism, and imperialism that has allowed this roadblock to fester, is necessary for our collective liberation. As Booker T. Washington noted so many years ago, "there is a tie which few white men can understand, which binds the American Negro to the African negro; which unites the Black man of Brazil and the Black of Liberia; which is constantly drawing into closer relations all the scattered African peoples whether they are in the old world or the new. There is not only the tie of race, which is strong in any case, but there is the bond of colour [sic], which is specially important in the case of the Black man."[83] As we discuss in the Narrative House, we need fuller and more nuanced stories about Black people around the world.

The recommendations by the California Reparations Taskforce, the country's first ever statewide task force on reparations, proposed solutions such as abolishing the death penalty and changing K-12 curriculum to better teach the legacy of slavery. [84] While the task force very clearly centered descendants of U.S. chattel slavery in their efforts, it still offered proposals that would affect all Californians. Like any policy program, conversation around eligibility will have to happen, but there is no need for this conversation to pit Black people across the diaspora against each other. It is important for us to remember that our enemy is, and always has been, the ideology of white supremacy.

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[78] Mitchell, Jessica. JAMAiwuyor. August 17, 2022.

[79] Foster, Herbert J. Partners or Captives in Commerce? The role of Africans in the Slave Trade. Journal of Black Studies. Journal of Black Studies.

[80] Darboe, Foday. Africans and African Americans: Conflicts, Stereotypes and Grudges. PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal: Vol 2: Issue 1, Article 19.

[81] IBID.

[82] Rickford, Russell. Beyonce's Black Is King and the Pitfalls of African Consciousness. Black Perspectives. August 18, 2020.

[83] Halter, Marilyn, Johnson, Showers Violet. African & American: West Africans in Post-Civil Rights America. August 29, 2014.

[84] California Department of Justice. The California Reparations Report. June 29, 2023.

04

Reverse Racism Narrative

Definition: A myth stipulating that white people are the actual targets of racism and discrimination. From claims of reverse racism, the term "woke," has been co-opted by conservatives to insult anything related to race, gender, or class-consciousness.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: The myth of reverse racism is closely tied to the narrative of meritocracy and racial progress. It is borne out of the belief that the U.S. has entered a post-racial era. It grew in prominence in the 1970s, sparked by the *Regents of the University of California vs Bakke*, where a white man named Allan Bakke argued that the University of California Davis medical school's affirmative action policy violated the 14th Amendment and discriminated against him because he was white. It resurfaced during the election and re-election of former President Barack Obama.

This argument was more recently at the center of the Supreme Court cases against Harvard College and the University of North Carolina brought by the Students for Fair Admissions, a group led by a white conservative man named Edward Blum, who argued that the universities' admission policies discriminated against white and Asian students to the advantage of Black and Latino students. The Court sided with Blum, with Chief Justice John Roberts noting in his opinion that "college admissions are zero-sum," and that "a benefit provided to some applicants but not to others necessarily disadvantages the former group at the expense of the latter."[85]

What has always been caught up in this narrative roadblock, dating back to the movement to abolish slavery, is a lack of comprehension on the intricacies of individual racism and prejudice, systemic racism, and power. Prejudice that may occur on an individual level between a person of color and a white person must be seen in the proper context of a system of power. Black people, as a collective, have been historically blocked from attaining significant economic and political power. As such, whatever prejudice that might occur on an individual level between a Black person and a white person does not mirror the type of prejudice levied against Black people on a societal level. As noted in a 1993 op-ed by Stanley Fish, "only when the actions of two groups are detached from the historical conditions of their emergence and given a purely abstract description can they be made interchangeable."[86]

How does it show up in our stories today? The reverse racism narrative is heavily relied upon by conservative media outlets like Fox News and is often lifted up alongside the "replacement theory," a right-wing conspiracy theory that argues that those on the left are attempting to replace white citizens with immigrants of color.

A 2022 *New York Times* analysis of the conservative talk show *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, showed that in over 600 episodes, Carlson "spoke of discrimination against white people and minimized racism against people of color."[87]

The investigation also found that in over 400 episodes the show "amplified the idea that Democratic politicians and others want to force demographic change through immigration."[88] The reverse racism roadblock permeates stories across our media landscape and political discourse due to a culture that centers whiteness. As explained in a 2021 report from PolicyLink, "in each institution and profession in mainstream America there has been a de facto whiteness framework which has shaped explanations, values, norms, and practices."[89]

This centering of whiteness, and particularly white people's feelings in regard to racial issues, ensures that the privilege that white people enjoy due to the legacy of white

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[85] Students for Fair Admissions, Inc v President and Fellows of Harvard College. June 29, ,2023.

[86] Fish, Stanley. Reverse Racism, or How the Pot Got to Call the Kettle Black. The Atlantic.

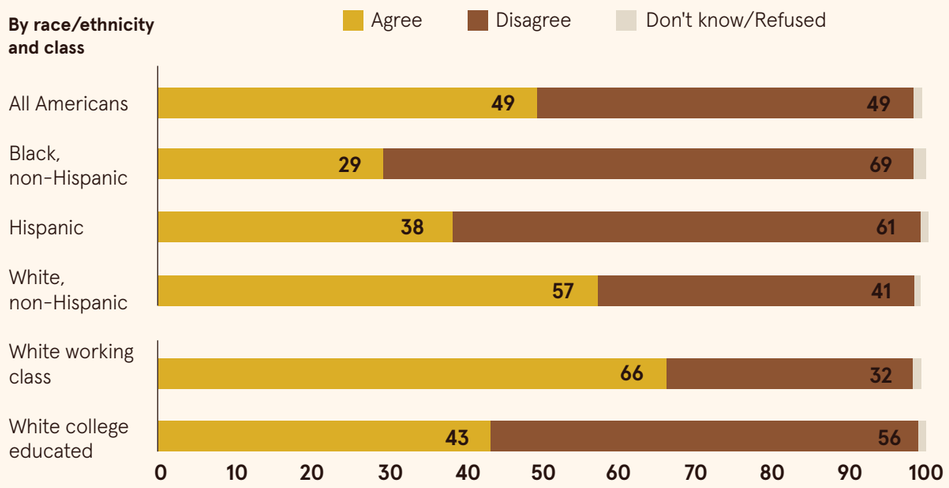
[87] Inside the Apocalyptic Worldview of Tucker Carlson Tonight. New York Times. April 30, 2022.

[88] IBID.

[89] Rubin, Victor. McAfee, Michael. Advancing Well-Being by Transcending the Barriers of Whiteness. PolicyLink. 2021.

supremacy remain largely unchallenged. The feelings of white people are so centered and uplifted in conversations about racial discrimination that a large portion of the country firmly believes that white people face the same levels of discrimination as other people of color.[90] Astonishing results from a 2015 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and Brookings Institute found that 49 percent of Americans believe that discrimination against white people was as big of an issue as discrimination against Black people or other people of color. Decentering whiteness and uplifting a critical analysis of power, and how it is unequally distributed across race, will be crucial in overcoming the reverse racism narrative.

Today discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities



Source: PRRI/Brookings 2016 Immigration Survey.

[90] Massie, Victoria M. Vox. Americans are split on "reverse racism." That still doesn't mean it exists. June 29, 2016.

05

Just the Cash Narrative

Definition: The notion that reparations are **only** about financial compensation.

Intra-movement Context: Reparations are about financial compensation, and liquid assets, such as cash, must be a part of the conversation. For centuries wealth in the United States has been amassed on the backs of Black people, some of it pillaged from Black communities. Given this, there is an economic aspect of reparations that must be addressed by the people harmed. In its totality, a reparations process must go beyond financial redress. We must explore how our demands for financial compensation intersect with the transformative vision for reparations.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: Although reparations payments in the United States go back to the late 1700s, historian and scholar Raymond Winbush claims the term "reparations" was first used in 1921, noting that the French used it to "describe proposed sanctions against Germany for nations it victimized during World War I."[91] The term gained further popularity and usage after World War II as Germany paid reparations for war crimes against Jewish people. Financial compensation has always been a component of reparations both in the context of the original usage of the word and calls for redress from formerly enslaved people before the word reparations was in use.

The roadblock here is not that the public narrative of reparations includes a financial component, but that the public narrative of reparations is often solely focused on the financial component of reparations. A sole focus on the financial aspect of reparations both belittles the other important aspects that must take place in a reparations effort in the United States and situates the conversation within a purely capitalist lens.

As prominent economists such as William Darity Jr. and Darrick Hamilton have explored, the Black-white wealth gap is one of the most significant indicators of the lasting legacy

[91] Winbush, Raymond.Belinda's Petition, A Concise History of Reparations for The Transatlantic Slave Trade. 2009

of slavery in the United States.[92] Therefore, closing it through a direct wealth transfer is one of the most important parts of a reparations effort. Though, as discussed throughout this report, employing this lens without a critical analysis of the ways in which the racial subordination of Black people and growth of global capitalism go hand-in-hand perpetuate the same ideals and narratives that we must deconstruct in order for transformative change to happen.

How does it show up in our stories today? As the research we commissioned from Harmony Labs and anecdotes from Lab members themselves demonstrates, the idea of reparations is often portrayed and seen mostly through a financial lens. In the media, compensation, either direct cash or in-kind compensation (such as tuition-free school) is a central element of the reparations story. News outlets in California reporting on the California Reparations task force often found ways to focus their stories on preliminary numerical figures which also often employed a "pie in the sky," frame. In popular culture, particularly comedy, the financial aspect of reparations is often used as a punchline that also frames reparations for Black people as either an impossibility or a simple repayment without the deep emotional reckoning work that should coincide with it.

This has been made popular by the catchphrase "40 acres and a mule," which has existed as almost folklore among Black people in the United States and has been popularized through efforts like filmmaker Spike Lee's production company, which is named after the broken promise. In political discussions, candidates like Marianne Williamson, have attempted to put a price tag on what federal reparations legislation would cost, which has also helped to shape the public narrative on reparations. In 2019, Williamson proposed a $500 billion plan for a "payment of a debt that is owed."[93] She has since updated her proposed figure to a minimum of $1 trillion and discusses other forms of transformative change that must accompany a financial reparations plan for slavery.[94]

[92] Massie, Victoria M. Vox. Americans are split on "reverse racism." That still doesn't mean it exists. June 29, 2016.

[93] Cole, Devan. Marianne Williamson wants up to $500 billion for reparations plan. CNN. August 7, 2019.

[94] Marianne Willamson for President. Reparations, Race Relations, and Reconciliation.

06

Too Complicated/Too Long Ago Narrative

Definition: The notion that going down the path of reparations for Black Americans would be too complex to solve because of the time that has passed since slavery.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: Opponents of reparations sometimes concede that a reparations effort would have made more sense for those who were directly enslaved, but since none of them are alive today, it's better that society moves on. This narrative is closely related and can be seen as a subset of the racial progress narrative, as it is often couched within the frame that the United States has made attempts to atone for slavery either through the civil war or civil rights legislation.

How does it show up in our stories today? This roadblock is often utilized by policymakers in political discourse not only about reparations but in any conversation addressing structural racism or anti-Blackness. The time that has passed since slavery has been used as an excuse by notable elected officials such as Mitch McConnell and Lindsey Graham, with the former stating that "we are so far removed from the event," that we should focus more on creating a "perfect union rather than looking backward."[95] It is also used to insinuate that reparations would be too costly to undertake and too complicated to figure out despite the abundance of resources available in the United States and other large-scale reparations efforts that can serve as a template for efforts here toward the Black community.

Those who uplift this narrative typically flatten reparations to only the monetary aspect while also arguing that it would be too complicated to figure out how much should be paid to recipients, who should get it, and how to finance it. Despite the fact that many of these questions have been answered by advocates and scholars alike, there is a federal bill known as H.R. 40, that has languished in front of their eyes for over 30 years that would set up a commission to answer these very questions.

[95] Barrett, Ted. McConnell opposes paying reparations: 'None of us currently living are responsible for slavery.'

07

Universalism Narrative

Definition: The notion that universal policies that disproportionately help Black people should be considered reparations.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: We see this narrative roadblock as distinct from the framework uplifted by the Othering & Belonging Institute and others called "targeted universalism," which they define as "setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals."[96] Instead, this roadblock is used as a wedge to frame reparations as divisive or unaligned with universal policies or frameworks like targeted universalism. It positions reparations as unnecessary because of other existing initiatives that seek to address racial disparities or inequities. Doing this denies and attempts to erase the specific mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical harm done to Black people by multiple entities (public and private) that still hold power within the United States, making it next to impossible for healing to occur. This roadblock is often a mirage utilized by those who want to appear as if they care about all oppressed communities but are instead using the ultimate goal of equity to position reparations as unfair or illogical. Similar to the diaspora at odds narrative, this roadblock typically activates a zero-sum mindset that falsely illustrates the United States as not having enough resources to fulfill reparations to Black Americans.

How does it show up in our stories today? One of the lab members, Dr. Jean-Pierre Brutus, who is a Senior Counsel at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, often tells the story about how the "Say the Word" coalition got its name. As the coalition was starting to form and advocates were encouraging legislators to pass a bill that would create a reparations task force across the state, the pushback the organizers received were couched in statements like, "Why can't we call it a racial equity taskforce," or a "racial wealth gap," task force? Given this, the campaign organizers came up with the strategy to dub the coalition the "Say the Word" coalition to pressure legislators to let go of fears they hold around the word reparations. Similarly, in the Lab, we discussed an exchange between radio host Charlamagne and comedian and TV host Bill Maher, in which Maher argues that Obamacare could be seen as a form of reparations.[97] Whether intentional or unintentional by the comedian, this conflation is dangerous and could lead down a slippery slope where we lose the real meaning and essence behind reparations for people who have been harmed on every level.

[96] Targeted Universalism Primer. Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley. May 2019.

[97] Reparations. Real Time with Bill Maher.

08

Black Irresponsibility, Criminality, and Undeservedness Narrative

Definition: The notion that poor social and economic conditions result from the Black community's own cultural failings and that financial compensation to Black people would be used recklessly, criminally, or both.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: As Nikole Hannah-Jones points out in the groundbreaking *1619 Project,* a key aspect "conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons some of the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery."[98]

Arguments for slavery hinged on the idea that Black people were inherently inferior and positioned slavery as a benevolent act that was a necessity of society. As argued in *Racialized Boundaries* by Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, colonialism was not simply an economic and political system but also a discursive system–meaning that the narratives undergirding the argument for colonialism supported the construction of race, Blackness, and of course, anti-Blackness.[99]

In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1784 and the only book Thomas Jefferson ever published, he remarks that Black people's "existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection," in an attempt to argue that Black people inherently harbor less intellectual capacity than white people.[100] He goes on to say that "comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior."[101]

The 19th century saw the successful use of "science" to fortify white supremacist mindsets and narratives of Black inferiority. Polygenism, a theory that had existed since the 14th century, used biblical theories to argue that God had made the white race superior. This ideology, while not a

[98] Hannah-Jones, Nikole. Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true. The New York Times Magazine 1619 Project. August 14, 2019.

[99] Anthias, Floya, Yuval-Davis, Nira. Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle. October 2005.

[100] Jefferson, Thomas. Notes on the State of Virginia. 1785.

[101] IBID.

science, according to Joel Garrod, "allowed scientific racism to flourish in light of the slave trade, which was seen to reinforce polygenistic beliefs."[102]

In 1833 writer, Richard H. Colfax, published Evidence *Against the Views of the Abolitionists: Consisting of Physical and Moral Proofs, of the Natural Inferiority of the Negroes,* in which he wrote "his lips are thick, his zygomatic muscles, large and full... his jaws large and projecting, his chin retreating, his forehead low, flat and slanting... all of these peculiarities at the same time contributing to reduce his facial angle almost to a level with that of the brute."[103] By "brute," Colfax was positioning Black people as closer to animals than human, and left his readers with the question "can any such man become great or elevated?" [104]

Around the same time, scientists, such as Dr. Samuel Morton, published pieces of work that were dedicated to comparing the differences in skulls across races and arguing that Black people had lesser cranial capacity than Europeans. The significance of polygenism and the birth of scientific racism cannot be understated–it laid the groundwork for the social evolution of anti-Black narratives in the aftermath of slavery. In fact, at a certain point, white people started to romanticize the characteristics of enslaved Black people compared to the emancipated population, with the latter being described as lazy compared to their enslaved ancestors. A very particular type of cultural power was awarded to scientists and medical professionals who could provide "scientific evidence," that could be used to support and substantiate anti-Black racial mythologies and maintain the social and racial hierarchy.

How does it show up in our stories today?: According to Dr. Michael Byrd and Dr. Linda Clayton, "by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American medical journals and textbooks were laced with pseudo scientific racist principles, derogatory racial character references, and pronouncements of impending Black racial extinction."[105] At the same time that academic and medical reasoning for racism flourished, the rise of minstrelsy and movies brought narratives of anti-Blackness and the notion of Black inferiority to mass audiences through various art forms.

In 1915, D.W. Griffith released *The Birth of a Nation,* a film that romanticized slavery, glorified the Ku Klux Klan, and reframed the Confederacy as benevolent defenders of their homeland. In it, Griffith further constructs the Black man as a "brute," as the plot of the movie traces the impact of two families who were on separate sides of the Civil War and how they were affected by Reconstruction. Movies like the *Birth of a Nation* would likely not fare well in Hollywood today, but the underlying notions of Black criminality, irresponsibility, and deservingness are now camouflaged more carefully within our cultural and political discourse. For example, conversations about work requirements for public benefits like food assistance or healthcare, typically have an air of anti-Blackness that lies just beneath the surface of the discourse.

In 2014, as then Congressman Paul Ryan was making the argument for work requirements he argued that those in the "inner city," are not inclined to work.[106] According to Ryan, within the inner city there were "generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work."[107] The mention of "inner city," was a purposeful dog whistle used to conjure images of the lazy Black male. Although Ryan did not mention women specifically, his words also conjure images of the welfare queen caricature made popular in the 1980s. We have seen, and will continue to see, overlap between the discourse of deservingness of public benefits, particularly as it relates to Black people, and the issue of reparations and financial compensation for slavery, Jim Crow, and its vestiges.

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[102] Garrod, Joel. A Brave Old World: An Analysis of Scientific Racism and BiDil. McGill Journal of Medicine. January 2006.

[103] Colfax, Richard H. Evidence against the views of the abolitionists: consisting of physical and moral proofs, of the natural inferiority of the Negroes. 1833.

[104] IBID.

[105] Byrd, Michael W, Clayton, Linda A. Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States: A Historical Survey. Journal of the National Medical Association. March 2001.

[106] Whitaker, Morgan. Paul Ryan blames poverty on lack of work ethic in inner cities. MSNBC. March 12, 2014.

[107] IBID.

09

Market Knows Best Narrative

Definition: The notion that it's natural for wealth and power to be concentrated in the hands of a few and that the resulting inequality is beyond the collective's control.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: While it is Ronald Reagan who helped bring the underlying ideology of free-market capitalism deeper into political discourse, Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, authors of *The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market,* found that the origin of free-market narratives date back to the early debates of child labor.[108] According to the authors, businesses who pushed back against progressive child labor laws that would take children out of the workplace claimed that "if you let the government tell business people what to do, it would encroach on their freedom to run their business." This argument has devolved into the current sentiment that any type of regulation on the markets is antithetical to freedom, and therefore, to the values of the United States.

This type of market fundamentalism, according to Oreskes and Conway, "is not just the belief that free markets are the best means to run an economic system but also the belief that they are the only means that will not ultimately destroy our other freedoms."[109] This ideology was popularized by organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers who launched campaigns that asserted that one of the principles that the United States was founded on was free enterprise.[110] As Oreskes and Conway note, this "fabricated claim," was used not only to bolster free-market capitalism but also to sow distrust in the government.[111] The most noted market fundamentalist, Milton Freidman, popularized the "market knows best" narrative through his book *Capitalism and Freedom*—influencing the likes of Ronald Reagan and a slew of think-tanks who spread the ideology in business schools, Hollywood, and political discourse.

As a result, according to Nell Abernathy in a brief for the Roosevelt Institute, policymakers now operate as "though firms and markets are power neutral, devoid of policy and politics."[112] Today, according to Abernathy we are left with policies that "promote private profit-seeking that too often takes the form of squeezing workers, arbitraging tax regimes and regulations, asset-stripping productive business, overcharging consumers, pushing out competitors and the government, and of course, influencing legislators."[113]

How does it show up in our stories today?: The "market knows best," narrative shows up in both overt and covert ways throughout modern economic, political, and cultural stories. Within this narrative "the market," is positioned as an amorphous, all-knowing, auto-regulating, structure that presents equal opportunity for all who would like to participate. In reality, as political theorist Abraham Leonard Keffe notes, "the market does not present equal opportunity, it is not impartial; it is actually pretty firmly dictated through certain key processes that accumulation allows the capitalist to exercise."[114]

There is no shortage of stories of capitalism and these, of course, overlap with stories of meritocracy and the "American Dream." In an episode of *Billions*, the Showtime tv-show about a high-profile lawyer and massively wealthy hedge fund manager, Bobby Axelrod (said hedge fund manager) makes a speech at his son's school where he declares that people are rich because they were more savvy than others, stating that "nature didn't select me... I selected myself by harnessing my nature."[115]

Capitalism and neoliberalism has also received a fair amount of critique in books like *The Big Myth* by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *The Myth of the Free Market* by Mark Martinez, and *The System: Who Rigged it, How to fix it,* by Robert Reich, politicians like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, and cultural commentators like bell hooks and Tupac Shakur.

In an interview before his untimely death, Shakur lambasted that there's too much money in the world, and how asinine it is that people own planes worth millions of dollars while there are people starving and homeless. "If they earned it, I think they deserve it and that's good," Shakur stated, but went on to say "if you earned it, you still owe."[116] There is an immense amount of opportunity and energy to be harnessed that can combat the "market knows best" narrative. As Reich asserts "we can make the economy work for us, rather than for only a few at the top, but in order to change the rules, we must exert the power that is supposed to be ours."[117]

[108] Oreskes, Naomi, Conway, Erik. The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market. February 21, 2023.

[109] IBID.

[110] IBID.

[111] IBID.

[112] Abernathy, Nell. Rejecting the Theory of the Firm: Why the Free Market Economy is a Myth and How to Rebuild Public Power. Roosevelt Institute. February 2019.

[113] IBID.

[114] Keefe, Abraham Leonard. The Fallacious Narrative of Free Market Capitalism. June 8, 2021.

[115] I Selected Myself. Billions Episode 3 Season 5. Showtime.

[116] Hoxie, Josh. Tupac Shakur on Inequality, Greed, and Donald Trump. Institute for Policy Studies. May 13, 2016.

[117] Reich, Robert. The Myth of the "Free Market" and How to Make the Economy Work for Us. September 16, 2013.

10

Harm is Everywhere Narrative

Definition: The notion that slavery and other forms of harm have always existed between communities and there is no way to repair it all.

Where did this narrative roadblock come from?: In 2021, CNN Editor-at-large, Chris Cillizza, wrote an op-ed titled "Why 'wokeness' is the biggest threat to Democrats in the 2022 election." Cillizza makes the claim that the Democratic party was in danger in the midterms because it had been pulled too far left by progressive, "woke" ideologies that the right successfully co-opted and branded as a toxic output of "cancel culture."[118] The piece cites a 2021 Pew survey that found that 57 percent of Americans thought that "people today are too easily offended by what others say."[119]

The "harm is everywhere" narrative is an outgrowth of the capturing of the term "woke," by the conservative right, but deployed particularly in conversations about targeted policies like reparations. This narrative sits alongside notions that the country has become too politically correct and that no one singular community deserves to highlight harm or inequality, because it has always existed throughout history.

One of the earliest mentions of "woke" was in a protest song by Lead Belly, a Black American folk and blues singer, for the Scotsboro Boys who were nine innocent Black boys who were falsely accused of raping two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931.[120] Belly offers that his advice to Black people, particularly when traveling in the South, is to "stay woke and keep your eyes open," or in other words, be aware of your surroundings as racial tensions could boil over at any second. The phrase evolved and gained popularity, particularly with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, that came to mean a person who had an understanding of the systemic ways racism affects society, and in particular the effects of racism on Black communities.

[118] Cillizza, Chris. Why 'wokeness' is the biggest threat to Democrats in the 2022 election. CNN. July 12, 2021.

[119] IBID.

[120] Syed Matthew, Sam Peach. Woke: The Journey of a Word. BBC. February 20, 2023.

As "politically correct," transformed to "woke," the underlying critique from the right has relatively stayed the same—that those who subscribe to "wokeness" are in fact, too sensitive. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis now regularly uses the word "woke," in a pejorative way and has defined it as a "belief there are systemic injustices in American society and the need to address them."[121]

How does it show up in our stories today?: The "harm is everywhere," narrative is based on the faulty notion that the United States genuinely cares about addressing harm. Similar to the "diaspora at odds," narrative, this roadblock is often uplifted without adequate context or historical analysis. In a clip that has received over 2 million views, Joe Rogan discusses modern-day human trafficking with writer Coleman Hughes, who has vocally opposed reparations for slavery. The two opine how there are more "slaves" today in the United States than there were before slavery was abolished, while comparing the human trafficking of today to U.S. chattel slavery.[122]

This comparison overlooks the societal context that normalized the institution of slavery throughout culture. It also implies that addressing the harm of chattel slavery and modern-day human trafficking are mutually exclusive, when in fact, both are viable possibilities.

This narrative is also often used to pit Black communities against other oppressed or marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous communities in the United States. This narrative is particularly evident in sentences that typically start with the phrase "what about," and end by articulating the harm of a different community. For example, a common counter argument against reparations to Black people in the United States is that no one deserves reparations more than Indigenous people native to the land. While that argument certainly has merit, it is levied in a way that situates the Black-led movement for reparations at odds with Indigenous people (or any racialized or marginalized communities claim for repair). In fact, if situated within the broader discussion of decolonization, then reparations for both Indigenous and Black communities in the United States must be a part of our conversation.

[121] Syed Matthew, Sam Peach. Woke: The Journey of a Word. BBC. February 20, 2023.

[122] Bump, Philip. What does 'woke' mean? Whatever Ron DeSantis wants. Washington Post. December 5, 2022.

STORY INTERLUDE:
THE RESILIENCE OF TULSA

"Our country may forget this history, but I cannot, I will not, and other survivors do not, and our descendants do not."

—Viola Davis, May 19th, 2021

In 1918, entrepreneur J.B. Stradford opened what was then the largest Black-owned-and-operated hotel in the United States. He envisioned it as a symbol of "hope" for Black Americans to "stand the test of white ridicule and hatred as a fortress of freedom."[123] Three years later, The Stradford Hotel in the Greenwood neighborhood of Tulsa, Oklahoma would be burned down in one of the largest racial massacres the country has ever seen.

On May 30, 1921, Dick Rowland, a young Black shoe shiner, was accused of assaulting white elevator operator Sarah Page. Historical accounts of what exactly happened vary, but one common story is that Rowland tripped while entering the elevator and, in an attempt to catch his fall, grabbed Page's arm causing her to scream and him to run away.[124]

By that afternoon the *Tulsa Tribune* had already published a front page story with the headline, "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl In Elevator," which fanned the flames of an already growing lynch mob that began organizing when word about the accusation started to spread throughout town. Rowland was arrested the next day.

What followed is one of the worst instances of white armed violence toward a Black community in the history of the United States. According to the official commission report published by the City of Tulsa in 2001, over the course of 18 hours "more than one thousand homes were burned to the ground, practically overnight entire neighborhoods where families had raised their children, visited with their neighbors, and hung their wash out on the line to dry, had been suddenly reduced to ashes."[125]

In just one day, according to the report, "nearly all of Tulsa's African American residential district—35 square blocks—had been laid to waste, leaving nearly ten thousand people homeless."[126] As many as 300 people died according to the report. Churches and businesses were looted and destroyed.

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[123] Parshina-Kottas et al. What the Tulsa Race Massacre Destroyed. New York Times. May 24, 2021.

[124] IBID.

[125] Tulsa Race Riot: A Report by the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. February 28, 2001.

[126] IBID.

The financial loss of the massacre was estimated to be between $32,560,722 and $47,376,836 in 2020 dollars.[127]

At the onset of the riot, as many as 500 white men and boys were hastily sworn in as special deputies of the Tulsa Police Department, granting them authority to engage in mass murder without fear of repercussion.[128] That same day, planes released bombs on the Greenwood neighborhood, making Tulsa the first American city to be bombed by plane.[129]

At the time, white vigilante violence, in some cases led by forces like the Ku Klux Klan, was common for Black communities, but what's more devastating about the Tulsa massacre is the role that the government played in the attack. The massacre was sanctioned, encouraged, and led by various local and state government entities—the Oklahoma National Guard rounded up thousands of Black residents and forced them to detention centers—while federal officials did nothing to help.

Similar to the suffering caused by slavery, what happened in Tulsa extends beyond financial loss and cannot be easily calculated. While there is no amount of money that can ever make up for the intergenerational trauma from which Tulsans endure, this hasn't stopped Black Tulsans from holding the City of Tulsa accountable for the role it played in the massacre.

If there is one word that can be ascribed to the survivors, descendants, and the Black community in Tulsa in general, it is **resilience.**

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[127] Albright et al. After the Burning: The Economic Effects of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. June 23, 2021.

[128] IBID.

[129] Crowe, Larry Kweku. The 1921 Tulsa Massacre: What Happened to Black Wall Street. National Endowment for the Humanities. 2021.

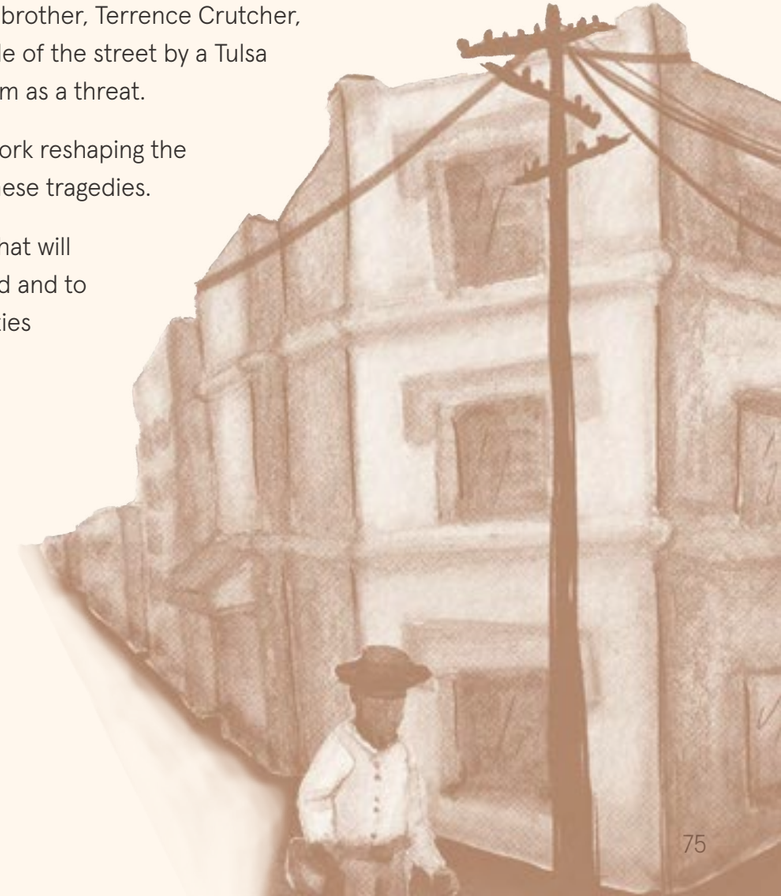
It is one of many words that can be used to describe the efforts of Lessie Benningifield Randle, Viola Fletcher, and Hughes Van Ellis, who are at the forefront of a law suit claiming damages caused by the massacre and its impact on the city and its residents, today.

It is **resilience** that drives attorney Damario Solomon-Simmons to wake up everyday to lead Justice for Greenwood, and argue for reparations for the survivors and their descendants, and pressure President Joseph Biden to use his position of power to finally bring justice for what was done in Greenwood.

It is **resilience** that impels Dr. Tiffany Crutcher, head of the Terrence Crutcher Foundation and member of the Reparations Narrative Lab, to stand tall in the face of the city's generational attack on her family. Crutcher's grandmother's house was burnt to the ground in the massacre. A century later, in September of 2016, her twin brother, Terrence Crutcher, was shot and killed in the middle of the street by a Tulsa police officer who perceived him as a threat.

It is resilience that drives her work reshaping the narratives in Tulsa that led to these tragedies.

And it is **resilience and hope** that will bring reparations to Greenwood and to the number of Black communities across the country that were similarly ruined.



THE NARRATIVE HOUSE:

SPARKING OUR COLLECTIVE RADICAL IMAGINATION

"Call me a utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us."

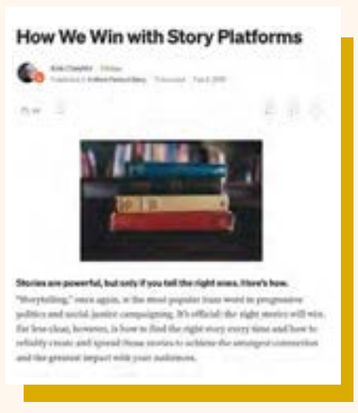
—Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

Why a Narrative House?

Inspired by other frameworks, platforms, and processes such as the Story Platform, the Waves framework, the Narrative Pyramid, and Narrative Systems, the Narrative House is both an invitation to and instrument for future organizing and storytelling that can expand both the conception of and the movement for reparations for Black people.

Pop Culture Collaborative Narrative Systems Framework

Narrative Initiative Waves Framework



Kirk Cheyfitz Story Platforms Framework

The Narrative House is not a talking points document. While that work is important, the Narrative House should be considered a **schema.**

Schemas are knowledge structures that allow us to interpret and understand the world. While frameworks tend to be more rigid, schemas are dynamic and subject to revision. Like our physical houses, the Narrative House can be modified, built upon, and expanded.

It does not attempt to define reparations, as there are numerous frameworks for that. This schema seeks to help anyone passionate about racial justice and equity, healing and repair, and the liberation of all people effectively tell stories to advance these causes.

The Narrative House, much like the reparations conversation, is in active construction, and we will iterate on it as narratives expand, shift, and change.

In the same way that we sleep in the bedroom, read in the living room, eat in the kitchen, and play in the backyard, we invite you to sit with the different levels of the Narrative House and see what resonates with your own personal or organizational story and mission. Narrative change and the Narrative House, while rooted in a thorough qualitative methodology, lean more toward art than science. There is no magic pill or words that we can say in order to accelerate the reparations movement—only organizing will fulfill that.

What we hope to do with this tool is offer an invitation to tell interconnected stories and construct a transformative narrative that will help to facilitate organizing and creative action and, in return, build the power necessary to change the world.

What the Narrative House is Not:

- The Narrative House is **not a talking-points document**—it does not assert itself as the way to discuss or articulate arguments for reparations, but is simply **one** way.
- The Narrative House **is not prescriptive**—simply repeating the words described throughout the house will not lead to our liberation, only organizing will do that.
- The Narrative House is **not static**—just like a physical house, it will need repairs, adjustments, and additions as the months and years go by.
- The Narrative House and the framework itself **is not owned by any one organization or entity**—any and all who are interested in repairing the harms of white supremacy and colonialism are welcomed.

What the Narrative House Is:

- The Narrative House **is an invitation** to build narrative power across movements, issues, and spaces.
- The Narrative House **is a tool** to be used for storytelling, individual and organizational meaning-making, strategic planning, content creation, organizing, grantmaking, and workshopping.
- The Narrative House is oriented toward **shifting narratives and culture at the societal level**—while there is harm to be repaired between individuals and the information included in the Narrative House may support work at that level, it is primarily geared toward societal narratives baked into U.S. culture.

The Different Areas of the Narrative House

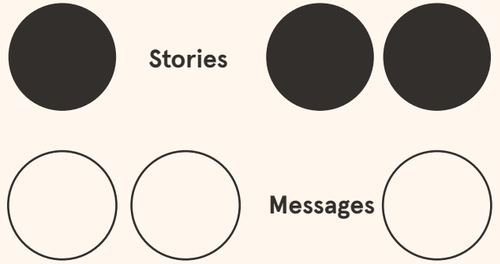
An articulation of the components of the Narrative House and vision of the world we want to build. What does society look like after a reparations process for Black people?

Narrative Areas of Opportunity

Strategic storytelling areas where a narrative can break through and catalyze a movement.

Core Narratives

A short and suggestive collection of stories rooted in shared values and common themes that uphold a particular frame or worldview.



Stories

The telling of a series of events, containing structural archetypes such as a protagonist, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Messages

The everyday verbal and nonverbal expressions of an idea, thought or feeling communicated by individual actors or organizations.

Deep Narratives

Underlying values and themes that ground the overarching narrative of the Narrative House and the stories within it.

NARRATIVE NORTH STAR CONTEXT

The Narrative House starts off with our Narrative North Star, which reads as a poem and a declaration. Through it we hope to evoke a range of emotions while also painting a clear picture of our vision of the world once we've realized reparations for Black people in this country. It does not touch on every single policy that would fall underneath a national reparations policy agenda but instead provides a vision for many of the outcomes that could result through a reparations process.

NARRATIVE NORTH STAR

Inspiration for Our Definition

Narrative Initiative's Definition of North Star: "By "North Star," we mean the future we're working toward. With that future, we, the big we, the diverse and dispersed us, can define the actions, principles, and stories that lead to that future."

Reparations Narrative Lab Definition of Narrative North Star: An articulation of the components of the Narrative House and vision of the world we want to build. What does society look like after a reparations process for Black people?

Our Process: We took the metaphors, emerging deep narratives, and conversations directly from the Lab and the Narrative Areas of Opportunity to write this.

It's true.

In this new world, Black lives not only matter, they are also **embraced, welcomed, cherished, celebrated, and deeply loved.**

It's peaceful here; Black people can **inhale deeply.**

Exhale freely.

When we wake in the morning, **money is not on our mind.** Surprise! Stranger things have happened.

No one has just **one home** because we've formed homes in our **relationships,** in each other.

There's a selflessness in the air— **gifting** is the standard, **and selling is the oddity.**

For some reason, everything tastes **sweeter.**

Black dance, song, and art are **cherished and properly admired.**

In a way, it feels like we've **pushed the reset button.** Black minds, hearts, and souls **have been restored.**

We've finally figured out how to distribute the abundance of resources **we've always had.**

We didn't just **tell the truth;** we chose to go down a new path and **hold it close forever.**

Land has been returned. Leaves and trees still fall, but no one claims them as their own.

If harm occurs, we don't banish; we embrace. Accountability **as a value and practice** runs through us.

Caring is neither womanly nor manly—we've abandoned that concept. We **care for all at all times.**

Anti-blackness **does not exist here.** Truly. Imagine that.

In fact, we've **unraveled our construction of race** and finally concluded it's much easier to love than to hate.

Yes, we are rich with **Black joy here.** Stranger things have happened!

Of course, there was **struggle, tension, and conflict along the way**—but our elders and ancestors warned us there would be.

Guided by their wisdom, **we persevered,** and through that struggle, we,

The collective we,

Up **from the ground,**

Repaired and transformed the world.

There are no utopias. But damn, it feels **good to be here.**

Well, well, well.

It seems we finally found our way.

NARRATIVE AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Inspiration for Our Definition

Story At Scale Story Pillars: Story pillars are "where to look for stories to tell. According to Story at Scale, the pillars grow out of the story platform to support particular areas for storytelling. They rise from the strategic understructure to connect the story platform with actual stories."[130] Story at Scale goes on to describe the pillars as: the bridge between strategy and tactics, between meta-narrative and real storytelling. This is why the pillars are also called "rich storytelling areas"—because the pillars show activists and artists where to look for the different kinds of stories we need to tell to different audience segments at different moments to create the change we seek to create over time.[131]

Reparations Narrative Lab Definition: Strategic storytelling areas for a narrative to break through and catalyze a movement.

Our Process: At our two-day, in-person convening facilitated by Melinda Weekes-Laidlow, we took the information from the focus groups and internal Lab survey data to identify themes and similarities across the data. Through this, we named the different tensions and breakthroughs that emerged to land on these areas of opportunity. We also analyzed the state of the current conversation and points within the conversation where we most often hit roadblocks and named frames that might help us overcome these areas of tension.

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[130] Story at Scale. Story Platform.

[131] IBID.

- **Cycle-Breaking, World-Making:** A framing that offers the story of reparations as a transformative process that not only creates a pro-Black world but dismantles oppressive systems and roots out anti-Blackness.
- **Becoming Reparationists:** A framing that offers an invitation to become a person wholly devoted to the repair, advancement, and liberation of Black people around the world.
- **Black History In Your Face!:** A framing that offers an unapologetic centering of Black visions and visionaries of Black radical thought that stretch beyond the confinements of our current sanitized history.
- **Reparations Unlocking Democracy:** A framing that offers reparations as a missing element in the vision of a functioning, inclusive, multiracial democracy.
- **Repair In Practice:** A framing that explores how we can repair harm at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels and how it connects to the larger call for reparations.
- **Radical Solidarity:** A framing that details the interconnected nature of reparations and Black liberation to other oppressed communities and transformative social movements.

CORE NARRATIVES

Inspiration for Our Definition

Narrative Initiative's definition of narrative: Narratives are the ideas and themes that permeate collections of stories.

Frameworks Institute's definition of narrative: Narratives are common patterns that both emerge from a set of stories and provide templates for specific stories.

Proverb: A short, pithy saying in general use, stating a general truth or piece of advice.

Reparations Narrative Lab Definition of Core Narrative: A short and suggestive collection of stories rooted in shared values and common themes that uphold a particular frame or worldview.

Our Process: Tracked the narratives that emerged within the Lab, focus groups, and external conversations. These are a collection of the narratives that the movement is currently using and ones that are emerging in this moment.

01

More Than a Check

The call for reparations must include financial payments but must also go beyond monetary compensation. Reparations that fit into capitalism without also seeking to uproot the anti-black narratives upon which our capitalist system was built will not lead to the liberation of Black people.

02

Harm Wasn't Linear, Repair Isn't Linear

Slavery as an institution was so complex and multifaceted that its tentacles and vestiges touch many aspects of our modern-day society. Therefore, reparations can't be drawn in a direct line backward. There are multiple culpable parties, including federal and state governments, universities, corporations, and banks, among others.

03

Black people are the experts of their own repair

Black people must lead in the conversation on reparations from both an emotional and policy perspective.

04

Reparations Now!

The longer we wait to repair the trauma of slavery and its legacy, the longer we deny and evade the dignity, integrity, and belonging that is birthed from repair.

05

History itself is a reparations issue

The erasure of Black history must also be taken into account for repair in any comprehensive reparations effort.

06

The past is not yet the past; it is with us today

The sins of our past still impact Black people today in a significant and systemic way.

07

You can't heal what hasn't been revealed

There is immense emancipatory power in truth-telling. Excavating the truths of our nation will set us free.

08

Reparations will grow from the ground

The power being grown at the local level on reparations will build momentum toward the national call for reparations. Reparations at the local, institutional, and national levels are all needed.

09

Reparations is an issue of now

Today's harm, particularly the violence wrought on Black communities through the carceral system, must be included in the reparations conversation.

10

The debt exceeds slavery

Reparations are a modern-day issue and the demand for reparations is not just about slavery.

11

The future is Black, the future is free

If we center Black people in our advocacy, the future will be free for all of us.

12

Reparations are the seed where all Black life can thrive

Reparations, as a process and a lens, create the opportunity for freedom and liberation for all Black people everywhere.

13

We need unity, not uniformity

Black people are not a monolith and will never be 100 percent aligned on any topic—though there is potential and opportunity for collaboration toward a shared vision.

STORIES

Inspirations for Our Definition:

Pop Culture Collaborative's definition of stories : A recounting of a particular series of events that occur in a particular place and time and often contain structural archetypes such as a protagonist, a problem, a path, and a payoff.

The seven basic plots (overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy, rebirth)

Reparations Narrative Lab Definition of Stories: The telling of a series of events, containing structural archetypes such as a protagonist, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Context: We each have stories to tell. There are millions of stories to be told about the Black experience in the United States. We organized this section of the Narrative House into the most common types of stories told in the Lab, types of stories we believe align with our Narrative Areas of Opportunity and types of stories that will strategically push the conversation forward. This section is adjacent to the Narrative Areas of Opportunity and should help storytellers and artists in particular tell specific, real, and imagined stories.

Stories of the Wholeness of Black Life

Black life, particularly in reality television, is typically shown through a one-dimensional lens or typecasted in certain roles. A 2015 paper that documented the portrayals of Black people over a 20-year span found that Black people were disproportionately represented in sitcoms and crime dramas.[132] The study also found that the prevalence of Black characters, particularly when depicted as attaining high social status, positively affected attitudes toward Black people. Of course, stories that cater to white respectability politics will also not do Black stories justice. Instead, we hope to see stories that tell the richness of Black life in all its complexities and nuances – this is critical as Blackness as a racial identity holds major importance within Black communities.

A Pew Research study found that a significant portion of Black adults (76 percent) noted that being Black was extremely or very important to how they think about themselves.[133] Pew also found that while 43 percent of Black immigrants saw a commonality between themselves and Black Americans, only 14 percent of Black Americans felt the same.[134] Stories that depict the entirety of Blackness across the diaspora can reveal the profound connections that exist among Black people, despite the global dispersion caused by colonialism. There is an immense amount of creative potential to harness the rich, joyous, beautiful stories to be told about the daily lives of Black people – we just have to tell them.

[132] Tukachinsky, Riva. Mastro, Dana. Yarchi, Moran. Documenting Portrayals of Race/Ethnicity on Primetime Television over a 20-year Span and Their Association with National-Level Racial/Ethnic Attitudes. Chapman University. 2015. Journal of Social Issues, 71, 17-38.

[133] Cox, Kiana. Tamir, Christine. Race is Central to Identity for Black Americans and Affects How They Connect With Each Other. Pew Research Center.

[134] IBID.

Stories of Enslaved People That Don't Center Violence

In discussing her Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Beloved,* Toni Morrison stated that "there is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course, there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive."[135] In conversations with Black people, you'll often hear of individuals who were unable to watch Ava DuVernay's *'When They See Us,'* which told the story of five young Black teenagers who were falsely accused of raping a woman in central park, or *12 Years a Slave* which tells the story of a free Black man sold into slavery, because of the emotional triggers the films illicit. In a 2021 article for The Atlantic, writer Hannah Giorgis describes this fatigue as resulting from the reality that "productions that engage with that real-life terror can, at times, feel more like brutal reenactments of senselessness than purposeful works of art, unintentionally compounding some Black viewers' traumas."[136]

While the daily realities of enslaved Black people were marked with physical and sexual violence, family separation, and psychological abuse – there are beautiful stories about resilience, reunification, triumph, and joy to be told about those who were enslaved. This can be done in a way that doesn't erase the horridness of their bondage, but instead showcases their humanity. Seeing Black people get tortured, maimed, and killed has long been normalized throughout society, and with the advent of cell phones and social media, clips of Black people being killed by the police circulate at warp speed. Black people should not have to showcase the brutality of slavery over and over again for other communities to empathize. We have enough stories of Black pain, it is time for more stories that portray the humanity of those who were enslaved that do not center the viciousness of the institution of slavery but instead the resilience of those who were enslaved.

[135] Kesur, Nandlal Bhupendra. Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Critique of Institutionalized Dehumanization Introduction. June 2019.

[136] Giorgis, Hannah. Who Wants to Watch Black Pain? The Atlantic. April 17, 2021.

Stories of A Black-Liberated Future

Ytasha Womack, who wrote *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture,* defined Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation."[137] Ingrid LaFleur, an art curator and Afrofuturist, defines it as "a way of imagining possible futures through a Black cultural lens."[138] Those who tell Afrofuturist stories usually employ different aspects of science fiction, speculative and creative fiction, history, and cultural commentary.

We need stories that bring to life the liberated world a transformative reparations process will usher forward. As noted in the Narrative North Star, in the new world we are building, Black lives not only matter, but they are also embraced, welcomed, cherished, celebrated, admired, and deeply loved. We need visual artists, musicians, poets, and storytellers from various disciplines to help paint this picture for audiences – so that we may all collectively buy into the future world that reparations will create.

Stories About Black Communal Power & the Black Radical Tradition

In *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America,* Stokely Carmichael (who would later change his name to Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton opine that for Black people to carve out a place of equality for themselves they would have to create their own terms "through which to define ourselves and relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized."[139] A part of this reclamation, according to Carmichael and Hamilton, would require the creation of a new value system that is rooted in "free people," and not "free enterprise."[140]

According to historian Peniel Joseph, the term Black power "exists in the American imagination through a series of iconic, yet fleeting images – ranging from gun-toting Black

[137] Womack, Ytasha. Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture. October 1, 2013.

[138] IBID.

[139] Carmichael, Stokely. Hamilton, Charles. Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America.

[140] IBID.

panthers to black-gloved sprinters at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics."[141] These images, while recognizable, do not tell the full and complete story of the construction of Black power, both as a movement and as a system of organization. These systems of organization have a long history, in what Cedric Robinson dubbed "the Black radical tradition," which he describes as arising as a result of the storied struggle against racial capitalism.

Across history, predating the bondage of African people, there are stories to tell of Black communities growing Black political, cultural, and economic power (we discussed the story of the thriving Greenwood community in Tulsa earlier in the report) that showcase what thriving Black power structures and systems look like. Stories of how this power was cultivated and achieved, without wading into the meritocracy or bootstraps narrative, can broaden how Black communities are seen and encourage participation in the reparations movement.

Stories About the Origins of Racial Wealth Inequality

U.S. wealth is built on stolen Indigenous land and largely through stolen African labor. Not only has the federal government reaped the benefits of this theft, but also corporations and families. A study conducted in 2000 estimated that about 20 million people living at the time were direct descendants of those who benefited from the Homestead Act, which gave away acres of land primarily to white families.[142]

Stories of individuals working hard to amass wealth need to be replaced with accurate stories of the structure and history of racial capitalism in the United States, the families who have historically benefited from it, the advantages and power it has given them, and how it was sustained and compounded over time. We must also tell the stories of the people in this category who have chosen to return their wealth and/or begun to repair the harm within their lineage and how it has transformed them.

This, of course, is not to be confused with the wealth amassed that cannot be traced back to slavery, what we commonly refer to as "new money." While there are Black billionaires and millionaires like Jay-Z, LeBron James, and Oprah Winfrey who fit into this category, we know that this is not the economic reality for the majority of Black people across the country.

We need fewer "rags to riches" stories, particularly about Black people, that prop up the myth of the "American Dream" and more stories that tell the truth about capitalism and how it subjugates and extracts from everyday workers, particularly Black workers. We also need stories that articulate a new relationship to money and labor in the world without getting stuck in the false binary of capitalism versus socialism.

Untold or Under-told Stories About Black Giants

The National Monument Audit, released by the Monument Lab in 2021, found that of the top 50 figures memorialized through public monuments, only three were Black. These three were Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass. While these three undoubtedly have a presence within the public understanding of this nation's history, their stories, particularly Martin Luther King Jr.'s, are often whitewashed and watered down to fit modern-day conservative or racially liberal narratives. More than that, there are names and faces to be ascribed to the everyday working-class people who powered the various iterations of liberation movements in the United States and across the globe – these Black people were giants too. Uplifting the individual stories of these unsung heroes is critical in our efforts to untangle the story of democracy in this country.

What a society chooses to publicly memorialize reflects its cultural values, and unsurprisingly, there are significantly more monuments of former enslavers across our monument landscape than those who were enslaved. We must share the stories of those who sacrificed to escape slavery in search of our collective liberation.

[141] Peniel, Joseph. The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field. The Journal of American History. December 2009.

[142] Shanks, Trina. The Homestead Act: A Major Asset-Building Policy in American History. 2000. Center for Social Development

Stories About Specific People Who Uphold White Supremacy

Progressive movements have steadily enhanced their capacity to identify systemic issues as the antagonists in our stories. There is a degree of understanding of the system of white supremacy and how it entrenches inequality across society, particularly in progressive spaces. Though, as our partners at Get Free, a youth-led social movement working to ensure freedom for all, suggest, it is imperative that we associate specific individuals with the perpetuation of white supremacy and clearly identify the key actors responsible for obstructing the path to liberation. Certain individuals, often wielding both political and economic influence, have a well-documented track record of making decisions that inflict harm upon Black communities. This power has been passed down from generation to generation in numerous forms, as revealed by a 2023 Reuters investigation which found that "more than 100 U.S. leaders – lawmakers, presidents, governors, and justices – have slave holding ancestors."[143] Today, many of these people pass policies that limit Black political participation, further enrich corporations and the wealthy, and fortify many of the narrative roadblocks named in this report. As we tell stories about these specific agents who uphold white supremacy, we must link how their individual stories and decisions uphold the tenets of colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism.

[143] Lasseter, Tom. Delevingne, Lawrence. Brice, Makini. Bryson, Donna. Brown, Nicholas. Bergin, Tom. America's Family Secret Part 1. June 27, 2023.

Stories About Global Decolonization Efforts and Reparations in Other Communities

Throughout the African continent, as well as in other nations worldwide, a profound shift in power dynamics has unfolded over recent decades. While often used in a variety of contexts, decolonization is an ongoing effort to terminate economic, political, and cultural control over a population by foreigners. By the conclusion of World War II, only four African nations had achieved independence. Yet, between 1945 and 1960, an unprecedented wave of decolonization led to the emergence of numerous African nations as sovereign entities. Presently, the African continent boasts 54 distinct nations, each bearing its own rich and distinctive histories.[144]

There are numerous stories of African diasporic independence that are purposefully kept out of U.S. public history classes. For example, the compelling stories of iconic leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Stephen Biko, alongside a multitude of others. The accounts of the Haitian Revolution and the sweeping mass movements that elevated African awareness and dismantled the enduring vestiges of colonialism within their respective nations serve as vivid illustrations. It is paramount that we not only acknowledge these narratives but also illuminate their intricate connections with the struggle for justice in the United States. Furthermore, there are opportunities to connect global reparations initiatives with the movement for Black reparations in the United States. Reparations for Black people are often portrayed as an unprecedented demand, but we must challenge this by sharing the stories of other reparations endeavors and the specific ways the United States has supported them. For instance, in 1947, the U.S. implemented Military Law No. 59 which served as the basis for the inaugural restitution program for Holocaust survivors.[145] Reparations is a globally recognized legal process, which the United States has advocated for in other instances. Uplifting this fact will be crucial in holding the U.S. government accountable for its injustices against Black Americans.

[144] Boddy-Evans, Alistair. Chronological List of African Independence. January 25, 2020.

[145] U.S. Department of State. Just Act Report to Congress: Germany.

Messages

Inspirations for Our Definition:

Reparations Narrative Lab Definition of Messages: The everyday verbal and nonverbal expressions of an idea, thought, or feeling communicated by individual actors or organizations.

There is no one way to discuss the issue of reparations. What this section will do is provide a snapshot of direct quotes that were communicated throughout the Lab by its members and those within the reparations movement they engaged with during this first phase.

"When you look back through history, almost everything that was created to benefit us, ended up being used against us."

—Rob Thomas

"We have to help people understand our interconnectedness as beings and how this historic and ongoing harm and extraction of our labor, wealth, and genius has to be addressed; that none of us can be all we're meant to be unless we address it. Building this sense of connection is core to moving our agenda – even among Black people."

—Makani Themba

"When we talk about narrative, we can't just talk about stories, we have to talk about the power that roots that story, and we're not going to be able to change the narrative if we don't change the root."

—Makani Themba

"Our people's story needs to be tied to the reparations story. We have to tie reparations to every violation of human rights that our people are dealing with right now."

—Dr. Akinyele Umoja

"Our struggle for reparations is not a new struggle, and the people aren't new."

—Dr. Mary Frances Berry

"There was a spiritual component and a psychological healing component for what Black people were trying to do for each other."

—Dr. Mary Frances Berry

"Reparations advocacy has been a long part of the Black radical tradition."

—Dr. Jean-Pierre Brutus

"The bottom line is that our work is to talk about harm as not only needing to be repaired but can be repaired."

—Makani Themba

"We need to specify what the harm is. Reparations are owed to us for what?"

—Richard Wallace

"If everything is reparations, then nothing is reparations to me."

—Erika Alexander

“Everything that Black people have endured is an outgrowth of slavery.”

—Dr. Tiffany Crutcher

“This isn’t just a story of what is stolen and what is owed; it is also a story about the economy.”

—Malkia Devich Cyril

“Wholistic repair is not going to come from the government; it’s going to come from spiritual and emotional transformations within our own community and the strengthening of self-determination.”

—Dreisen Heath

“Our liberation is not bound to a corrupt establishment. Coalition and movement building have helped sustain this movement, and that is ultimately where the power is.”

—Dreisen Heath

“The Land Back movement is a liberation and reparation framework that facilitates a cross-conversation between movements.”

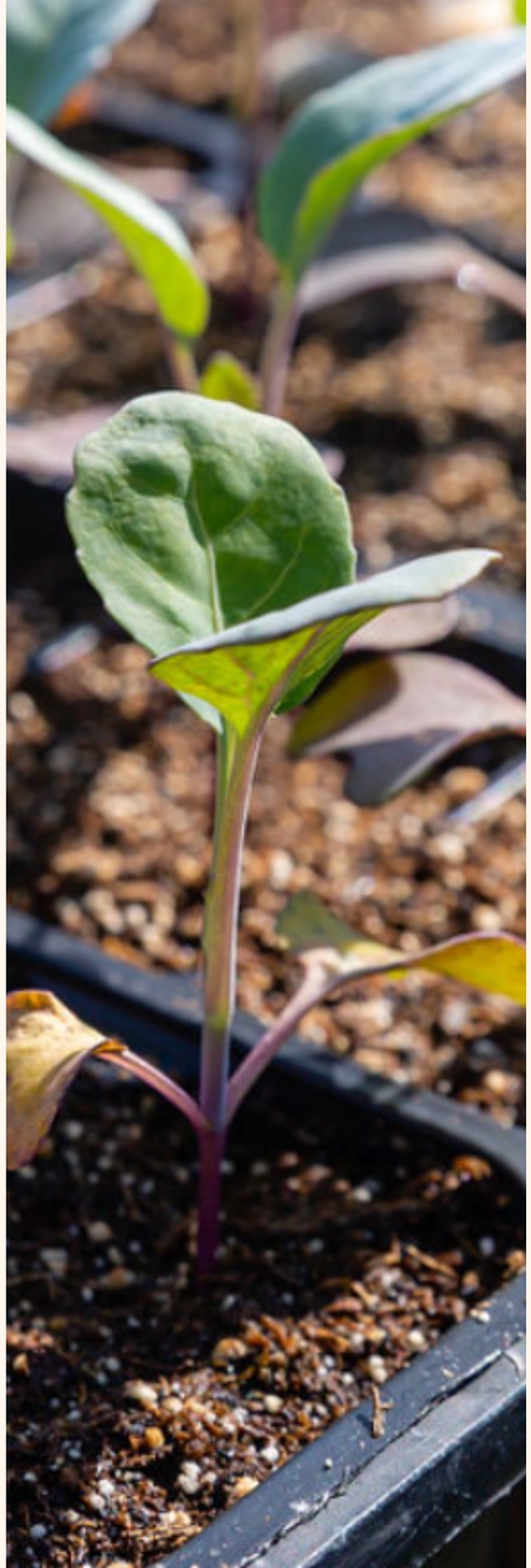
—Nick Tilsen

“There is a world where land is returned to Indigenous people and reparations for Black Americans are implemented. It’s not an either-or thing.”

—Nick Tilsen

“We’re dealing with systems and a social movement, and this helps us respond effectively to both; whether it’s about reparations or criminal justice reform, we need to take into account both white supremacy and white nationalism.”

—Eric Ward



“Our opposition understands that there is political benefit in attacking Black movements and Black leadership.”

—Eric Ward

“The guarantee of non-repetition as it relates to chattel slavery, we would need to eradicate anti-Black racism in the United States.”

—Richard Wallace

“We should look at reparations as being on a continuum. Abolition and reparations are interrelated and connected with overlapping processes that are aligned in certain ways.”

—Dr. David Ragland

“We must look at this as a balance sheet—we are still dealing with some harm.”

—Kenniss Henry

“Full reparations for me means that at the end of the day, all of the harms that have been perpetrated upon Black people are wiped out.”

—Kenniss Henry

“Each harm area needs its own specific remedy—whether it’s segregation, slavery, or redlining. There are so many different things that can be uncovered in each community. I hope for transformative justice.”

—Rob Thomas

Deep Narratives

Our Inspirations

Theme: An important idea that is woven throughout a story. It is a concept that underpins its narrative.

Butterfly Lab Definition of Deep Narratives: Narratives, in turn, are held together by underlying frameworks and values—what we call deep narratives. These deep narratives constitute worldviews, how people understand the world.

Reparations Narrative Lab Definition of Deep Narratives: Underlying values and themes that ground the overarching narrative of the House and the stories within it.

Our Process: Analyzed internal lab and focus group data.

Context: The Butterfly Lab, one of the many inspirations for the Reparations Narrative Lab, created a narrative system they define as "a set of deep narratives that together describe the worldview we want to activate at a majority level." This narrative system provides a roadmap or "destination" to ground rapid response narrative projects, policy campaigns, and cultural strategies. The deep narratives below were named most often throughout our focus groups with other reparations organizers and in internal Lab sessions. They are, of course, not the only deep narratives that were named. Values we hold dear differ across individuals, families, organizations, and movements. We hope the set of deep narratives below provides an understanding of the motivations behind our storytelling in service of reparations. They are in no way prescriptive of the values of the movement.

Justice:

Justice frequently serves as a theme in progressive social movement communications. The concept of justice is generally referred to in the assessment of social institutions and basic social structures but there is no single philosophical consensus as to what we mean as a society when we say "justice."[146] Across the reparations and broader racial justice movements, justice is generally used to describe the moral obligation an individual, institution, or system owes to another. There are immediate throughlines between justice movements (environmental, criminal, racial, economic, etc) and the movement for reparations, that should be recognized and maintained throughout our organizing and storytelling.

How Do We Know If Our Stories Are Rooted In Justice?

We hope and expect to see those involved in justice movements, particularly those interested in racial justice, include reparations for Black people on their policy agendas and uplift the narratives and stories outlined in the Narrative House. Across the stories and messages we communicate about reparations, justice has historically undergirded them by linking reparations as a morally correct objective.

Key components of stories rooted in justice may include:

- Threads and underlying tones of the morality of repair and reparations
- Threads and underlying tones of responsibility and a duty to repair past harms
- Threads and underlying tones on fairness and ensuring all people begin life from the same starting point
- An underlying concern of societal wrongs and what is owed to Black people

[146] Vallentyne, Peter. Justice in General: An Introduction In Equality and Justice. 2003

Accountability:

Accountability and justice are often used within the same dialogues, particularly in conversations about harm and punishment. In simple terms, accountability can be understood as the extent to which an individual is answerable to another (e.g., a supervisor, a mother, etc.). According to abolitionist Mariame Kaba, most people who subscribe to an abolitionist vision have come to understand accountability to be "an active process through which people have to make a decision that they recognize the harms that are occurring, they want to try to redress them, and they're thinking about the harms through the lens of what's been done to others but also what's been done to them."[147]

As described in Liberation Ventures' repair framework, "accountability invites us to claim full ownership of the harm that has been excavated and named, take responsibility for it, and commit to changing our behavior to ensure non-recurrence."[148] Across the racial justice movement, mention of accountability usually refers to holding governments and their institutions accountable for the harm they've caused, participated in, or were negligent in preventing. According to Kaba, accountability takes into account a sense of responsibility to oneself and can only truly come from within. Telling stories about the government's role in initiating and sustaining harm may push it to be accountable in addressing that harm—but the action of accountability must come from the person or entity that has done wrong.

How Do We Know If Our Stories Are Rooted in Accountability?

Stories are rooted in accountability when they include: transparency, fairness, and specific examples of abuse of power. They explore attainable steps that the party responsible for harm must take to right their wrong. There's also a specific, accurate, and direct calling out of responsible parties.

Key components of stories rooted in accountability may include:

- Threads and underlying tones about transparency
- Threads and underlying tones about fairness being trampled on
- An attention to how power was abused or misused
- Concrete steps that the party responsible for harm must take to step into an accountable position

Healing:

"Healing racialized trauma begins with your body," according to Resmaa Menakem.[149] Whether we acknowledge it or not, the racialized trauma experienced by Black people across the country lives in every Black body. We are connected by the wound of slavery and colonization, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, police brutality, medical harm and poor healthcare, environmental abuses, etc. Reparations are a solution to healing that wound. As has been repeated throughout this report, the healing and repair goes beyond money. True healing must include the body—physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

How Do We Know If Our Stories Are Rooted in Healing?

Across our storytelling on reparations, we hope to see the healing power of reparations, not only for Black people but for the entire nation, as a common thread. Harmful and aggravated deep narratives seek to divide and engage in zero-sum storytelling and situate

[147] Kaba, Mariame, Rice, Josie Duffy, Sultan, Reina. Uncaging Humanity: Rethinking Accountability in the Age of Abolition. Bitch Media. December 8, 2020.

[148] Florant, Aria. A Dream in Our Name. Liberation Ventures. February 2023.

[149] Menakem, Resmaa. Healing Racialized Trauma Begins With Your Body. November 17, 2020.

an “us versus them” mentality. Stories rooted in healing seek to unite people and recognize the legacy of racialized trauma and how it shows up in our minds, bodies, and words. Healing stories center on Black people as a whole and recognize that the fate of our liberation is not bound to Eurocentric concepts of value.

Key components of stories rooted in healing may include:

- Threads and underlying tones about inner healing
- Threads and underlying tones about interpersonal healing
- Threads and underlying tones about cultural and societal healing
- Threads and underlying tones about empathy (a lack of it or increasing it)
- Metaphors linking white supremacy to sickness or disease

Wholeness:

Across the reparations movement, wholeness is often referred to as a state of being that reparations can deliver us back to. Wholeness refers to the “quality of being or feeling complete, and not divided or damaged.”[150] Mindfulness and wellness fields describe wholeness as a framework that rests on purpose, balance, congruence, and sustainability. Other research has set forth dimensions of wholeness including physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual. Spiritually, wholeness is a state of being perfectly well in both body and soul. Similar to healing, this deep narrative speaks to the entire being of Black people and the imperative that reparations transform the way Black people are seen across the globe. In addition, it speaks to the potential for this nation to live up to its founding ideals.

How Do We Know If Our Stories Are Rooted in Wholeness?

Stories of wholeness must include human rights frameworks, messages, and understandings. Key components of stories rooted in wholeness include but are not limited to: threads of interconnection between people and systems; threads and underlying tones about happiness and wellness (emotional, physical, social, spiritual, etc.); uplifting of the importance of stronger interpersonal relationships; reframing of our relationship to labor and productivity; uplifting of basic material needs in life.

The image conjured when thinking about wholeness is often a circle but perhaps an infinity loop is a better way to picture it in this context. The work of reparations should be understood as a journey that we must continue and build on to make Black people whole.

- Threads and underlying tones of interconnection between people and systems
- Threads and underlying tones about happiness and wellness (emotional, physical, social, spiritual, etc.)
- An uplifting of the importance of stronger interpersonal relationships
- A reframing of our relationship to labor and productivity
- An attention and uplifting of basic material needs in life

[150] **Wholeness Definition. Cambridge Dictionary. “The quality of being or feeling complete and not divided or damaged.” Retrieved September 13, 2023.**

Truth:

According to Dr. David Ragland and Dr. Melinda Salazar, reparations are a "spiritual practice, not just a transaction, and go hand-in-hand with truth-telling. They are a relational healing practice from spiritual, moral, and material harm."[151] A large property of truth is language and the stories we tell as a society over and over. With the rise of disinformation and intentional anti-history campaigns seeking to dismantle and ban essential studies like critical race theory, it will be imperative for the movement to counter this and ensure that the true founding story of this nation is told.

How Do We Know If Our Stories Are Rooted in Truth?

Stories rooted in truth depict a radical form of truth-telling that speaks truth to power, centers Black history and thought, and seeks to tell the objective truth about Black life, and the need for repair. The founding narratives of the United States were based on lies and myths that painted Black people as subhuman and Indigenous terrain as newly found land. At the core of our storytelling is uprooting and transforming these myths with the truth of what this country is and who it has historically sought to serve.

Key components of stories rooted in truth may include:

- Threads and underlying tones about interrogation and reckoning
- Threads and underlying tones about societal responsibility
- Threads and underlying tones about sincerity and integrity
- Attention to the role that racial violence and anti-Blackness plays in society today

[151] Truth Telling Project.

POETRY INTERLUDE:
DEAR BLACK TRANS PERSON

By: J Mase

Dear Black trans person,
I hope you begin to believe all the good things about you.
I hope someday soon you'll get to rest, lower your shoulders, and be unburdened by all this toxic mess.
I hope you'll remember Vitoria the Jinbandaa, Obatala, Mary Jones, and Pauli Murray.
I bet they try to tell you not to let these people convince you that you're something new.
I hope this country gives you **reparations** for all the things they've done to you.
These people out here acting like they ain't been
Stealing your gifts, your labor, your brilliance, your wisdom, your strength, and your beauty.
They've been transfixed and trying to dilute it cause they've been trained to consume you.

COME INSIDE:

THE NARRATIVE HOUSE AS A TOOL FOR RECONSTRUCTION

"This may only be a dream of mine, but I think it can be made real."

—Ella Baker

The Narrative House was conceived as a tool, that could be useful for organizers who canvas in their communities, communication and narrative strategists who can help their organizations step further into the reparations conversation, and storytellers and artists who want to use their own platform or artistic practice to further the reparations movement.

The Lab explored how we could test the Narrative House as a tool by partnering with artists, creatives, and content creators who were already interested and invested in reparations and could help further our learning.

Crafting new stories and narratives

Our first attempt at using the Narrative House came during a March 2023 Lab session, where we invited five artists, storytellers, and content creators to join forces in crafting content that uplifted a specific Lab member's story, a piece of the Narrative House, or both.

Through an in-depth conversation and workshop, content creators had the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts about ongoing activities and stories throughout the reparations movement. They used the Narrative House, particularly the Narrative Areas of Opportunity, to explore different routes they could take with their videos. The content creators produced nine different pieces of content that utilized a range of styles, undertones, frames, and approaches. One video was told through a comedic lens, another utilized poetry, and a few connected important pieces of history to organizing being done today. In total, the pieces of content garnered over 500,000 views across various social media platforms including TikTok, Instagram,and Youtube.

In one breakout room we paired four Lab members who are working on reparations advocacy at the local level with Garrison Hayes, a video journalist and founder of Kindred Media, a creative agency committed to supporting organizations that create online content that shifts how the world thinks. Hayes has nearly 340k followers on TikTok, and routinely creates clear, well-produced, and engaging content that has garnered close to five million "likes" on the platform.

Hayes worked with the following Lab members to create four videos that explored reparations in their respective city or state.

- **Dr. Tiffany Crutcher, Terrence Crutcher Foundation:** This video explored the story of the Tulsa Race Massacre and used footage of Dr. Crutcher's 2021 Congressional testimony about the massacre. Hayes relied on repetition throughout the video, asking the listener questions that always started off with "Did you know?" The video intricately weaves together the personal narrative of Dr. Crutcher and her family, historical facts about the Tulsa Race massacre, stories about some of the living survivors, to a strong call for reparations.
- **Dr. Jean-Pierre Brutus, New Jersey Institute for Social Justice:** This video provided a history lesson on New Jersey's role in slavery and explained why New Jersey is known as the "slave state of the North." Employing a blend of compelling quantitative data drawn from prior research conducted by the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, interwoven with narratives of the state's deeply ingrained racist history, Hayes presents a compelling case for the imperative of reparations statewide.

- **Richard Wallace, Equity and Transformation:** In this video Hayes provides a compelling case for the inclusion of recent policy transgressions, such as the devastating war on drugs, within the scope of reparations. He offers the audience a concise yet comprehensive examination of the profound impact these contemporary policies have inflicted on Black communities, all the while highlighting reparations campaigns like the one spearheaded by Equity and Transformation.

- **Rob Thomas, Asheville Racial Justice Coalition:** In this video, Hayes puts reparations within the local context through the story of Asheville, North Carolina and the work being done by organizations like the Asheville Racial Justice Coalition to push the city to address anti-Black harm committed at the city level.

Instead of providing Hayes and our other storytelling partners with predefined talking points, we fostered an environment that facilitated a dynamic and organic dialogue between the storytellers and Lab members, anchoring the discourse in the Narrative House as a guiding framework. We believe that this approach facilitated a richer and more engaging discussion, empowering the storytellers to delve into the Narrative Areas of Opportunity that would most deeply connect with their audiences.

The four videos that Hayes produced garnered close to 200,000 views, with his video focused on the history of slavery in New Jersey registering 150,000 views alone.

As our colleagues at the Cooperative Impact Lab note, "persuasion isn't just about finding the right messenger or words; it's about connecting with audiences in the right way."[153]

Hayes' videos masterfully blend compelling storytelling with data-driven insights. This unique fusion not only enables his audience to gain an understanding into the pervasive issues of structural racism but also underscores reparations as a potent solution to this challenge. Recent research aimed at dispelling misperceptions about the Black-white wealth gap has demonstrated that when data illustrating wealth inequality is interwoven with compelling narratives that breathe life into the statistics, it significantly narrows the information and perception gaps surrounding this issue.[154]

We also partnered with J Mase, a seasoned poet, educator, and dedicated organizer who has been working in the justice and equity space throughout his career. Mase worked on two videos in coordination with the Lab—a poignant poem (featured earlier in this report) and a thought-provoking video addressing the concept of the hope gap. The deliberate variation in the approach between these two projects reflects the Lab's strategic pursuit of deepening its comprehension regarding the most effective forms of storytelling tailored to distinct audiences.

The poem, which was explicitly targeted toward the Black trans community seeks to highlight the intersections that exist in the harm permeating throughout the Black community. While Black trans people only make up 13 percent of the transgender community, Black trans women account for nearly 75 percent of homicides.[155] We know Mase's video, and future storytelling, directed at the most marginalized communities within the Black community will be important to ensure that the movement for reparations is an inclusive one that welcomes all Black people, no matter their gender, sexuality, or religion.

Mase's other video utilized a mix of storytelling that pulled from history and analysis done through the Lab. Through the conversation with Lab members about the hope gap, Mase uplifted the data from Pew about the lack of belief amongst Black people that reparations are possible, while using the story of Callie House, one of the foremothers of the reparations movement, to showcase the progress that has been made over time. This was not only significant because it lifted up the significance of Callie House, likely introducing many people to her for the first time, but also straightforwardly addressed the hope gap and the importance of closing it.

This activity provided great insight for how the Lab hopes to partner with artists and storytellers in the future. As the Lab advances, it will continue its commitment to collaborating with creatives in a manner that fosters a vibrant and unconstrained space for dialogue and artistic expression. What was particularly striking about the Lab's video productions is that they each embarked on their own unique journey in interpreting and articulating the Narrative House, bringing it to life through both literal and interpretative means. This aligns with our overarching vision for constructing narrative power.

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[152] **Making Two New Jersey's One: Closing the $300,000 Racial Wealth Gap in the Garden State.. New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. February 2022.**

[153] **Gage, Kate. Filling the Progressive TikTok Gap. November 30, 2022.**

[154] **Callaghan, Bennett. Harouni, Leilah, Dupree, Cydney, Kraus, Michael, Richeson, Jennifer. Testing the efficacy of three informational interventions for reducing misperceptions of the Black-White wealth gap.**

[155] **Madler, C. Murders of trans people nearly doubled over the past 4 years, and Black trans women are most at risk, report finds. CBS News. October 13, 2022.**

Testing Our Content

Our objective in conducting content testing was to gain deeper insights into the factors that enhance belief in the support and feasibility of reparations for Black individuals, as well as gauge which narratives are most effective in garnering support. We partnered with Swayable, an online media content testing platform, which uses randomized controlled trial testing to measure the impact of content against a control group that had not been exposed to the piece of content that we tested.

We analyzed each piece of content crafted in collaboration with our storytellers, pulling valuable insights that we believe will support future storytelling within the reparations movement. For example, Hayes' New Jersey video notably increased the perception of reparations as a tangible possibility among all respondents, irrespective of their initial stance on reparations.

Some of the comments in Garrison's TikTok comment section included:

While more research is needed to understand the drivers of this increase, we've developed a few hypotheses for why this might be:

- The video about New Jersey highlighted a statewide and coordinated coalition, the Say the Word coalition. Seeing a collective of people actively working on this issue may have made it more tangible for the viewers to grasp.
- Hayes reframed slavery and Jim Crow as institutions that extended beyond the boundaries of the South, a revelation that was novel to many survey participants and viewers of his TikTok video. Notably, one survey respondent, a 53-year-old white man residing in Houston, Texas who identifies as a moderate, expressed how this fresh perspective had shifted his outlook on inequality. He asserted that reparations could "go a long way to mending the fences between Black and white people."

We found that Hayes' videos in comparison to the other pieces of content from other storytellers such as Amanda Seales, J Mase, and Dr. Nicole Truesdell, were highly successful at increasing support for reparations. Not only were his videos effective in moving people who already were in support of reparations, we also found that his videos were particularly effective in moving those who are opposed to reparations for Black Americans.

For instance, his video about the Tulsa Race massacre was highly effective at increasing levels of support and belief that the United States needs to make amends for past harm across all respondents by a large magnitude. Based on the data, the video was particularly strong at garnering an emotional response from all respondents. Our hypothesis is that tying reparations to a concrete yet specific moment of violence sanctioned by the government works specifically well.

More testing will need to be conducted to get a clearer picture as to what exact messages, narratives, messengers, and stories might increase support and belief for reparations. Nevertheless, our initial analysis gives us rich qualitative and quantitative information to help our short-term storytelling and advocacy efforts.

It will be critical for the movement to continue to test and understand how the broader narratives of our campaign and those included in the Narrative House resonate with different audiences, both from a demographic and psychographic standpoint, so that we can continue to iterate on what works and uplift the

stories and data points that we know push us closer toward our Narrative North Star.

As Lab member Jean-Pierre Brutus notes, the story of reparations for Black people "requires the United States to reckon with its history and current reality in a way that would disabuse it of its founding myths and stories it tells itself and the rest of the world."

Source: J Mase on Tik Tok

The Power of Black Comedy

Humor has been used as a tool of resistance since the early days of slavery. Some enslaved people utilized comedy to tell stories that criticized the institution of slavery and those who oversaw it, while providing hope for themselves and others held in bondage.

For many, it may seem hard to grasp how comedy can play a role in such a heart-wrenching issue as slavery, but history has shown that social commentary by Black comedians have played an integral role in providing comedic relief for Black communities and timely critiques of society. Empirical research on global issues such as the Syrian refugee crisis found that comedy can have a significant effect on public perception, attitudes, and behavior.[156]

Specifically, the research found that watching a satirical news segment about the refugee crisis "either alone or alongside a traditional news segment is more effective than watching news alone," as it relates to increasing how much the American public cares about the issue.[157] Other research has posited comedy to have a "sleeper effect" on public opinion, meaning topics that take a comedic angle are more memorable and stick in the minds of viewers over time.[158]

These studies show there is both a usefulness and stickiness to comedy, and in the context of reparations, perhaps no other piece of comedy reflects this point better than Dave Chappelle's 2003 Comedy Central *Chappelle Show* skit on reparations, which remains one of the most notable pop culture reference points on the issue.[159] The skit starts off with Chappelle playing the role of a white anchorman named Chuck Taylor who reports that Congress passed legislation to "pay over $1 trillion dollars to African Americans for reparations for slavery," and that the first checks had started to be sent out.

The scene then cuts to Queens, New York, where there are dozens of Black people standing in front of a liquor store and a Black man who bought a truck of menthol cigarettes. Another scene mentions that "8,000 record labels had been started in the last hour," and that "Cadillac sold 3,000 Escalades in the last hour alone," with the reporter noting, "these

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[156] Lauren, Feldman, Chatoo, Caty Borum, Comedy as a Route to Social Change: The Effects of Satire and News on Persuasion about Syrian Refugees. Mass Communication and Society.

[157] IBID.

[158] Nabi, Robin, Moyer-Guse, Emily, Byrne, Sahara. All Joking Aside: A Serious Investigation into the Persuasive Effect of Funny Social Issue Messages. 2007. Communication Monographs.

[159] Neal, Brennan (Writer), Chappelle, Dave (Writer), Kroll, Nick (Writer), Allen, Andre (Director), Goldthwait, Bobcat (Director), Vincent, Scott (Director). 2003, Feb 12. Reparations & NY Boobs (Season 1, Episode 4). Chapelle Show.

people seem to be breaking their necks to give this money right back to us."[160]

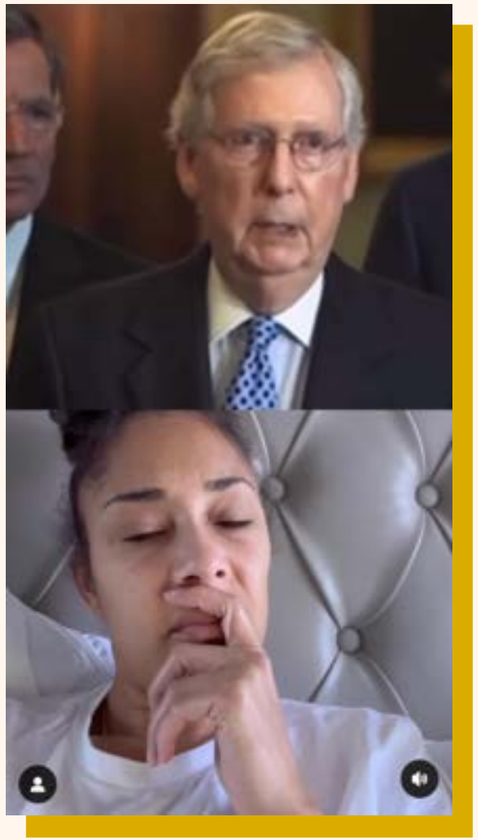
Chappelle's skit, as with much of his earlier work, plays on Black stereotypes and tropes that date back to the minstrel show era and uplift many of the narrative roadblocks we identified as part of our Narrative House construction, such as the 'Black Irresponsibility Narrative' and the 'Just the Cash Narrative.' He notably walked away from Comedy Central when he realized his skits were not merely satire, but in fact, for some, reinforced negative stereotypes of Black people.

While comedy can and often does use racial stereotypes or anti-Blackness as a punchline, it is also "uniquely positioned to confront injustice and re-envision social reality in ways that engage and inspire," as explained by Caty Borum Chatoo and Lauren Feldman, authors of *A Comedian and an Activist Walk into a Bar: The Serious Role of Comedy in Social Justice.*[161] For example, the comedian Hannibal Burress, is often credited as reinvigorating the conversation about Bill Cosby's history of sexual assault through his stand-up, which at a specific cultural moment shined a light on a story that had been brushed aside for decades. Black comedians have always played the role of social commentators, active participants, and the producers of punch-lines and one-liners that take on a life of their own and stick in people's psyches for decades.

In an interview, Paul Mooney, a comedian known to push boundaries, produced a line that has been circulated and recirculated across social media platforms for years. In it he says, "everybody want to be a ni**a, but don't nobody want to be a ni**a."[162] Alluding to the fact that Black culture has been copied for centuries, while Black people are demonized for that same culture. As Borum Chatoo and Feldman make clear, comedy can offer "a creatively deviant lens on a problematic status quo," and contribute to "a new societal portrait by which people shape and interpret meaning."[163] Within comedy, it has often been Black comedians who have held up a mirror to the United States, forcing it to face the injustices it has committed toward Black people for centuries.

While Chappelle has become a polarizing figure in recent years due to a bombardment of transphobic content in his most recent specials, scholars who have conducted content analysis of his work have argued that his comedy, particularly the *Chappelle Show*, is a form of resistance to societal norms regarding race and anti-Blackness.[164]

Chappelle's reparations sketch has had a lasting and negative effect on our cultural understanding of reparations and reinforced many of the anti-Black stereotypes that many Americans hold about Black people. Until Ta-Nehisi Coates' notable article, "The Case for Reparations" in 2014, Chappelle's depiction of reparations may have been the most popular and widespread depiction of reparations to a mass audience in the last 20 years.



Screenshot from Amanda Seales video made in collaboration with the Reparations Narrative Lab

Another important example is comedian Chris Rock's stand-up on inequality in the United States. Rock states that his house costs "millions of dollars," but that in his neighborhood there were only three other Black people—Mary J. Blige, Jay-Z, and Eddie Murphy. Rock quickly runs through some of the accolades that these three notable Black artists have achieved before delivering the punchline—his white neighbor is a "fu***** dentist."[165] One doesn't need to be deeply steeped in economics to understand Rock's point, which is, for a Black person to live in a very wealthy neighborhood they have to be a celebrity who's reached the pinnacle of superstardom, while a white person can simply have an upper middle-class job.

After analyzing clips like the *Chappelle Show* skit and the more recent episode of FX's television series Atlanta, which took a satirical angle on reparations in the episode, "The Big Payback," the Lab actively pursued collaboration with a comedian already utilizing their platforms to engage with issues of race and racism. We worked with actress and comedian Amanda Seales, renowned for her stand-up comedy and appearances on shows like HBO's" *Insecure*.

With an Instagram audience of over two million followers, and a core audience of Black women, Seales came into our conversation knowing

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[160] IBID.

[161] Chatoo, Caty Borum. Feldman, Lauren. A Comedian and an Activist Walk into a Bar: The Serious Role of Comedy in Social Justice. March 2020.

[162] Chapelle Show. Paul Mooney: Everyone Wants to be a Ni**a.

[163] Chatoo, Caty Borum. Feldman, Lauren. A Comedian and an Activist Walk into a Bar: The Serious Role of Comedy in Social Justice. March 2020.

[164] Wetterberg, Lyndsey. Deconstructing "Chappelle's Show": Race, Masculinity, and Comedy as Resistance. 2012. Minnesota State University, Mankato.

[165] Chris Rock, Kill The Messenger: Neighborhood. HBO.

she wanted to create a video that could debunk some of the most popular counter arguments used to dismiss reparations, while infusing her typical lighthearted sarcasm. The result was a video that directly replied to Senator Mitch McConnell's remarks on Juneteenth 2019 in which he stated that he "doesn't think reparations for something that happened 150 years ago for which none of us currently living are responsible is a good idea."[166]

McConnell uplifts what we describe as the "too long ago narrative" which cements its argument in the fact that too much time has elapsed since the end of slavery and thus the conversation of reparations should be seen as a non-starter. Seales artfully debunks this narrative while calling for her followers to become "reparationists," and to find ways in which fulfilling the promise of reparations fits into their daily lives.

The clip garnered over 280k views on Seales' Instagram page and elicited a slew of positive comments from her followers, including:

"Exactly! Just like generational wealth exists, generational poverty exists too... we deserve a piece of the cake we baked."

"We need to lean in hard on this. Please, continue to make this a call to action as we move forward. Thank you for all that you have done and are doing to awaken and educate people around the world."

"I have a great grandmother that passed away only 6 years ago at 105 years old... this is not as far removed as they think. #reparationsnow"

[166] Don Lemon Tonight. Mitch McConnell: Slavery Reparations aren't a 'good idea.' CNN.

Given the size of her platform, Seales' single video reached the most people compared to the rest of the videos that came out of the writer's room, but interestingly our results from Swayable found that it did not significantly change attitudes for many respondents across many of our audience segments. We found that for those who already were mild or low supporters of reparations, Seales' video decreased the likelihood of these respondents to share articles or donate toward the cause, and received some degree of backlash. While the Lab found Seales' video inspiring, funny, and intriguing, more testing should be done to understand whether it was the content, format of the video, or Seales herself that may have caused the backlash.

We include this finding because for too long racial and social justice organizations have relied on superficial metrics such as the sheer number of views a piece of content garners, while overlooking how our content influences public opinion or perception on specific issues. As practitioners we must redefine how we understand the impact of the stories we tell. Metrics, like views, retweets, or clicks represent merely one facet of the impact spectrum we should monitor. It's imperative that we expand our toolkit to include a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of our narratives, particularly among our target audiences.

A great example of how we can track the impact of our messages in real-time is an analysis from Grow Progress which analyzed Golden State Warriors Head Coach Steve Kerr's remarks on gun control after the mass shooting in Irvine, California. They found that Kerr's video increased support in gun control laws by 14 percentage points.[167] This is critical because advocates in the gun reform space could now share Kerr's remarks far and wide in the days and weeks following the massacre and could strategize how to activate Kerr, and by extension the Golden State Warriors, on the topic of gun reform in a long-term way.

It's crucial to highlight that this form of testing is costly and often beyond the reach of grassroots organizations. Philanthropic funders with a commitment to advancing racial justice, particularly those keen on promoting the principles of narrative change, should urgently increase their investments in this type of research.

Opposition Content

Lastly, we tested the efficacy of our oppositions narratives. We used a clip from Mitch McConnell's remarks from Juneteenth and found even those who supported reparations found his arguments to be persuasive. We found McConnell's video decreased levels

[167] Berezin, Josh. The effects of Steve Kerr's remarks on gun violence. May 25, 2022.

of support for reparations among those who already identified as mid- to high-level supporters of reparations, indicating that the "too-long-ago narrative" McConnell and other opponents of reparations regularly rely on may be particularly effective at dissuading support for reparations, even among those who already support it.

As our research consultant, Christina Pao, hypothesized, "since Mitch McConnell's rhetoric attempts to directly remove responsibility from people in this generation for the ongoing harms of enslavement, he indirectly suggests that it is the job of individual people to pull themselves out of poverty."

In other words, the "too long ago" narrative may inherently invoke narratives of meritocracy and "bootstrapism," which we know are deeply baked into the American psyche through stories like the American Dream. The FrameWorks Institute has written extensively about the challenges of debunking strategies or attempts to directly counter or expose the frivolousness of our opposition's message. They note that it is tempting for advocates to "craft communications that try to debunk misconceptions," but that this tactic is actually a trap.[168] Attempts to debunk misconceptions often elicit thought patterns that already exist within prominent mental models throughout society and therefore inadvertently strengthens the message you are trying to debunk. A more effective action according to FrameWorks would be to "navigate... unproductive patterns of thinking," by avoiding harmful dominant narratives and instead make an affirmative argument for your cause.[169] Since Seales' video was in direct response to McConnell's, it could be that displaying the opposition video may have had the opposite desired effect than intended and instead created mixed feelings about reparations, even among supporters.

Notably, Seales' video appears to have had an impact on her target audience—young Black women. Our analysis revealed that her video increased support for reparations for Black women as a whole, particularly women 35 years old and younger. This is significant within the context of the hope gap we discussed earlier. Further research needs to be done to explore the impact Black women narrators have on support levels. In the future, the Lab will focus on better understanding how social identity factors into heightening the salience of our narrative roadblocks and boosting support for reparations.

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[168] Framing Strategies to Build Understanding of Improvement Science. Frameworks Institute. 2017.

[169] IBID.

SPREADING THE NARRATIVE HOUSE:
OUR COURSE OF ACTION

This section seeks to capture the ways in which organizers, storytellers, and organizations within the social and racial justice ecosystem may find the Narrative House useful. Framing activities utilizing the Narrative Areas of Opportunities can also be found in the resources section of the microsite.

Just like there is no one way to decorate or find comfort in a physical house, we believe that there is no single way for the Narrative House to be used—that is the beauty of schematics. In this section, we've provided prompts, questions, and ideas that may facilitate an array of activities, action, or workshops at different levels of storytelling.

We believe organizations, artists, writers, showrunners, policymakers, funders, and others who are committed to racial and social justice will find the Narrative House useful in helping them take an organizational stance in favor of reparations for Black people. The Narrative House is a tool that can help these groups make meaning of and articulate a communications, policy or narrative strategy that supports greater alignment across the movement.

For those aforementioned groups that have the communications infrastructure and capacity (eg: dedicated communications, marketing, advocacy, or narrative staff), we recommend holding space for a conversation grounded in the question, "what is our organizational stance on the topic of Black reparations?"

The following questions and activities may be helpful in answering this question, but we invite you to use the Narrative House in a way that may best suit your organizational needs.

NARRATIVE NORTH STAR:

Start by having staff read the Narrative North Star out loud and ask the following questions:

- What emotions were apparent in your body as the North Star was being read? Why do you think these emotions were apparent?
- What does a future world where reparations for Black people are realized look like? What if anything would you add to the North Star?
- Does your organization have its own Narrative North Star? (a version of this could be articulated in an organization's mission or vision statement). If not, ask yourselves the following questions:
  - What does society look like once we've achieved our mission and shut the doors to our organization?
  - What does that society feel like?
  - What do people get up and do in the morning that is different than the way we start our days currently?

Narrative North Star Questions:

Fill in the following blanks. Living in a future world where reparations are realized is like _____ because of _____. This activity was a key aspect in constructing our Narrative North Star and elicited responses from Lab members such as:

"A future world where Black reparations are possible taste like **cotton candy** because **it's sweet."**

"A future world where Black reparations are possible feels **like pushing the reboot button** because it gives us the **opportunity to start over."**

"A future world where Black reparations are possible feels **like pushing the reboot button** because it gives us the **opportunity to start over."**

"A future world where Black reparations are possible feels like **being on the beach** because it's peaceful."

NARRATIVE AREA OF OPPORTUNITY

Please see the framing activities on the microsite *within the Narrative House section to find ways to explore each Narrative Area of Opportunity in further detail.*

Inspired by our project consultant, Melinda Weekes-Laidlow, and our friends who were involved in the Story at Scale project, we view this area of the Narrative House as one of the most potent areas for ideation and exploration. Each Narrative Area of Opportunity provides different openings for telling a story of reparations through a different frame. We understand that one Narrative Area of Opportunity may resonate with one person or organization over another. We hope that these can help support brainstorming about ways in which organizations (or individuals) can find their own voice within this space.

For too long, reparations has been framed strictly through a financial lens, and as we articulated earlier in this report, the financial aspect of reparations is important, but it does not tell the full story of how we repair the social, psychological, physical, and emotional harm that slavery and the vestiges thereof has caused. We envision the Narrative Areas of Opportunity as fodder for exploration of framing strategies that may go beyond what we've detailed in the House.

Scholars have noted that collective action frames can help "mobilize potential adherents and constituents to garner bystander support and to demobilize antagonists."[170] Like the rest of the Narrative House, the Narrative Areas of Opportunity listed are not the only frames that will be helpful in storytelling about reparations. We believe these framing areas will both help increase understanding of how to frame

[170] Benford, Robert. Snow, David. Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. 2000.

Narrative Area of Opportunity

reparations as a solution to a number of different problems our country faces and facilitate on-ramps in specific spaces of public discourse.

It is important to mention that in using different frames within social movements there is always the potential for an overemphasis on a specific frame that may lead to the development of different factions within the movement. For example, a study of the anti-death penalty movement found that the movement splintered into two specific camps, which the study described as "abolitionists and litigators," with the "former advocating for abolishment of capital punishment and the latter focusing on the more modest task of saving lives of their clients one by one rather than as a class."[171]

While this may sound alarming, throughout the Lab, we continuously returned to the words spoken by Lab member Rob Thomas, who noted that "we need unity, not uniformity" or what our friends at Narrative Initiative might call a polyvocal approach to narrative change. "Alternate meanings and translations don't diminish a narrative," according to Narrative Initiative, and embracing a polyvocal approach will allow us to encourage as many people and voices to enter the movement and "expand the potential for successful deployment and uptake of narratives."[172]

Sociologist Erving Goffman, author of, "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience," defined frames as "schemata of interpretation that allows individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label, experiences and stories in their own life."[173] We envision that these Narrative Areas of Opportunity will provide support in making reparations resonate on a personal level with different audiences across the country.

[171] Haines HH. 1996. Against Capital Punishment: The Anti-Death Penalty Movement in America, 1972-1994.

[172] Weidinger, Rachel. Polyvocal narrative strategy: Turning many voices into durable change. Narrative Initiative. 2020

[173] Goffman, Erwin. Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience. Harvard University Press. 1974.

Narrative Area of Opportunity

Those interested in using any of the Narrative Areas of Opportunity may ask themselves the following questions:

- Which Narrative Area of Opportunity align most with the work and/or campaigns that you are already working on?
- Take stock of the different frames your organization currently uses *(ie: human rights framing, justice framing, equity framing, etc.)*
  - What are the characteristics of the frames you currently use?
  - How were they developed?
  - How have they furthered the work of your organization?
  - In what ways do they intersect with the Narrative Areas of Opportunity within the Narrative House?
- Look back through the history of your organization/issue you are focused on and name different important historical events where a frame was amplified and/or developed. What are some potential inciting events that may further the Narrative Areas of Opportunity in relation to your organization's mission?
- What are the constraints blocking these opportunities? (refer to the Narrative Roadblocks) What activities can be deployed through your organization to explore the telling of stories that may sit within these opportunities?
- These Narrative Areas of Opportunity are not static, similar to collective action frames, they will evolve and be transformed as the movement progresses. Is there a framing area that you think is missing from the Narrative House that aligns with your work?

Narrative Area of Opportunity

  - If so, how would you articulate it?
  - What are the social, political, and/or economic factors that might affect how this frame operates within the movement and broader society?
- Who is your primary audience? What Narrative Area of Opportunity may be the most appealing to them and why?
  - What Narrative Area of Opportunity may resonate best with your target audience in the short-term (1-3 years) and in the long-term (5-10 years)?
- Which Narrative Areas of Opportunity speak to each other? Are there ways that they can be connected in a transformational way?
- What specific stories might exist in the different Narrative Area of Opportunities?
- What cultural values exist within the different Narrative Area of Opportunities?
- How do the different Narrative Area of Opportunities connect with other social movements or issue?
- How can the Narrative Area of Opportunities be explored and deepened to anticipate your opposition?
- What narrative roadblock does each Narrative Area of Opportunity transform?
- What ways have the Narrative Area of Opportunities shown up through the media?

CORE NARRATIVES

The Core Narrative section of the Narrative House is what we hope to see plastered on billboards and protest signs, mentioned in quotes to press, and repeated in conversations and dialogues on reparations. They are an on-ramp to the ideas and themes that undergird the stories that we hope can spread throughout society.

Across movements, slogans or mottos emerge such as "We Shall Overcome," used by participants in the Civil Rights Movement, "Reconciliation is Dead," a phrase used by Indigenous populations in Canada to underscore the fact that promises of "reconciliation" by the Canadian government have gone unkept or "Si Se Puede," a term used by the farm workers movement in the 1970s. More recently, the rallying cry of "Stop Cop City," emerged almost immediately after news that the Atlanta Police Department would be building a military grade training facility in the South River Forest on the outskirts of Atlanta.

Activists and the social movements they organize according to Dr. Sidney Tarrow, should be seen as both "consumers of existing cultural meanings and producers of new meanings."[174] We hope that the reparations movement and the Narrative House schematic can support the production of new meanings and understandings of race, capitalism, white supremacy, and colonialism in this country. To achieve this, we hope to popularize these core narratives to a point where they become a part of our society's vernacular—and can be understood without additional context.

These core narratives can help organizations and individuals make inferences about an understanding of reparations that appropriately places it within an adequate social, economic, psychological, and political context and helps the public think beyond just the financial aspect of reparations.

More core narratives may emerge, particularly within specific cities and states across the country, in deeper exploration of the Narrative Areas of Opportunity. Emergence, according to writer and organizer adrienne marie brown, "notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies."[175] As more connections are made within the reparations movement, we envision, both at the narrative and interpersonal levels, more core narratives will emerge and spread across spaces.

[174] Tarrow, Sidney. The New Transnational Activism. Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics. 2005.

Core Narratives

Organizers and communications/narrative staff within organizations may answer the following questions:

- Are there any current campaigns or storytelling initiatives that you are currently involved in and/or leading that already focus on reparations or employ a reparative lens? *(ie: baby bonds, guaranteed income pilots, bail funds, etc)*
  - If so, are there any core narratives in the Narrative House that can be used or modified that support that work?
  - If not, are there core narratives that you currently use or would like to use that would push forward narratives surrounding repair and/or reparations?
- Do your campaigns or storytelling initiatives uplift any core narrative (or one close to it) identified in the Narrative House? If so, what are they, and how do they show up in your communications, advocacy, and/or policy materials and initiatives?
- Do your campaigns or storytelling initiatives face any of the narrative roadblocks identified in this report? If so, what are the ways in which we are currently working to counter these narratives?
- Are there any core narratives that are listed in the Narrative House that can be infused within your campaigns?

[175] Brown, adrienne maree. Emergency Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. April 18, 2017.

STORIES

The story level of the Narrative House should be the most appealing to writers, showrunners, producers, filmmakers, and anyone else involved in creating story arcs. In our thinking about storytelling and how to construct stories that would support the reparations movement, conversations often went outside the policy realm, and touched on the different stories we must tell about history, Black life, and the world on the other side of a reparations process.

Stories provide a window for which reparations can be better understood across age, race, political affiliation, gender, religion, and other social identities. We believe that stories, when told well, can fill the gap in understanding about repair as a concept and reparations specifically for the Black community. In this level of the Narrative House, we name the types of stories Lab members wanted to see more of. In many ways, we see this level of the Narrative House being used as a visualization pre-production tool for stories that we hope to see across mediums.

It's critical that we also point out that our movements rely on the same mass media that has been at the center of perpetuating anti-Black stereotypes, some which have directly led to the lynching of Black people. In thinking about narrative power, the narrator of the stories we want to see are critical. A critical part of this work that the Narrative House does not explore is what a thorough and deep investment in Black-owned storytelling infrastructure could look like—we must own the means of production of our stories from the writing, filming, editing, and production. We must do this while also disrupting the current media infrastructure whose major actors have played a significant role in developing and sustaining anti-Black tropes.

Stories

If we think of this section of the Narrative House as a mood board for the types of stories that we'd like to see told at scale, then the following questions may be helpful to those who are interested in producing and/or funding in this realm:

Fiction: Choose a specific part of the story level of the Narrative House.

- What are the critical parts of this story that you want to tell *(ie: For a story about slavery that doesn't center violence, you could craft a story on the love between two young people on a plantation or a family being reconnected after being separated for decades)?*
- What are the narrative elements (plot, conflict, rising action, falling action, setting, tension, etc.) that you want to explore in this story? What is your narrative arc?
    - What are three key scenes that you'd like to see in this story area?
- Is there a Narrative Area of Opportunity that fits into this story *(ie: a story about an alternative universe where Black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Fred Hampton weren't murdered could explore multiple NOA's including Radical Solidarity, Black History in Your Face!, and Cycle Breaking, World Making)?*
- What are the overarching themes that you'd like to communicate through this story? *(see deep narratives for inspiration)*
- What are the emotions that you'd like the story to evoke and why?
- What narrative roadblock does this story push back against?
- Who is your primary audience and what are you hoping they learn or get activated about when consuming this story?
- How does this story allow audiences to identify with either the characters or the plot of the story?

STORYTELLING EXERCISE:

Introducing a Black Liberated Future

Exercise 1:

- Revisit the “Black Liberated Future,” section of the Narrative House and read the short paragraph in that section.
- Place yourself in 2040, the United States has passed a federal reparations bill five years prior, what does society look like? What time do you get up? What is the first thing that you do when you wake? What do you do with yourself? What does labor look like across society? How does your body feel?
- Imagine you overhear your Black neighbor talking to their parents; it’s a happy conversation. What are they talking about?

Exercise 2:

Choose a topic from the ‘stories’ section of the Narrative House.

- Who or what is the main focus of your story?
- What are the critical parts of the story that you want to tell?
- What are the narrative elements (conflict, rising action, falling action, setting, tension, etc) that you want to explore in this story? What is your narrative arc?
  - What are three key scenes that you like to see in this story area?
- Who has covered this story before?
  - What did they get right or wrong in your opinion?
  - What frame was this story told through?
  - Who were the characters in the story? What part of their story might need more exploration?

Storytelling Exercise: Writing your own story

- What other pieces of research needs to be done?
  - What data (qualitative or quantitative) can be used to emphasize parts of your story?
- Is this story a personal story? If so, inquire about care for the story or community you are documenting *(pulled directly from the BROKE project’s “Self Care for Storytellers”)* [176]
  - “Have you invested time to build a relationship with the community and the people you are asking to share their stories?”
  - “Have you invested time with the community to learn from them and have them guide your approach to strategy and storytelling?”
  - “Have you been vulnerable with the community and shared your own story and motivation for your work?”
  - “Have you given space for the storyteller to share what is true for them, without leading them to tell a particular type of story?”
  - “Are you showing respect to your storyteller by listening with an open mind and heart to their story and knowledge?”
  - “Are you careful not to try to conform the storyteller’s experience to a particular trope, stereotype or eurocentric way of telling the story?”
  - “As you design your strategy and partnership with storytellers, how can you build in trust, transparency, and respect?”

[176] Self-Care for Storytellers, Or Your Story is Yours. BROKE Project.

Storytelling Exercise: Framing the Black Panthers

Storytelling Exercise: Framing the Black Panthers

This storytelling exercise was inspired by Professor Tilar J. Mazzeo of Colby College who wrote an excellent course guide for creative nonfiction writing.[177] One of the most important parts of a story is its introduction—how readers, viewers, or listeners are pulled into the story often depends on how strong its beginning is. Mazzeo defines "story starters," as "the combination of character, conflict, and narrative that sets a story in motion—an essential element of a great beginning."[178] They developed the following writing exercise which we've repurposed to center repair and reparations.

- Picture yourself as a journalist and look at the below picture of Black Panthers standing outside a courthouse.
    - What might a story from the mainstream press focus on at the time (late 1960s-1970s)? What frame might they tell the story through? Would they lift up any of the narrative roadblocks named in this report? Why or why not?
    - What is the story that you want to tell in this picture? What Narrative Area of Opportunity outlined in the report would you employ? Is there a narrative roadblock that you would seek to push back against? What is the narrative arc of this story? How did we arrive at this point and at what point of the story are we in?

[177] Mazzeo, Tilar. Writing Creative Nonfiction Course Guidebook. Colby College. 2012.

[178] IBID.

Storytelling Exercise: Framing the Black Panthers

Photo courtesy of the State Governor's Negative Collection, 1949-1975, Washington State Archives. [179]

- There are a number of characters who could serve as the main character—the man farthest down the steps, the younger looking Black man at the center of the picture, the white sheriff with the hat on, the photographer, or yourself as the narrator. Which personal lens do you want to tell the story through?
- Use what you know about the Black Panther Party (or take 20 minutes to research who started it, what they stood for, and some of their initiatives) and write a scene using this picture.

[179] Black Panther demonstration. Photo courtesy of the State Governors' Negative Collection, 1949-1975, Washington State Archives.

MESSAGES

The message level of the Narrative House is the most malleable part of the House and least prescriptive. Our goal in this level of the Narrative House was not to provide the exact messages that everyone must say. Instead, we sought to give a snapshot of the messages that movement actors who are actively engaged in this debate use everyday in explaining their work or reaching their audiences. We hope that the Narrative House and this report in its totality can support organizations in the crafting of talking points about reparations.

For organizations that are interested in crafting their own messages and talking points about reparations, some qustions to consider include:

- What is your organizational voice? What spaces are your perspectives currently respected in? *(ie: conversations about equity, conversations about gender equality, conversations about democracy, etc.)*
- Do you have an internal and external public stance on the topic of reparations? If not, what is the process to craft a stance? Once a stance is identified, how can the organization communicate the stance clearly in its external communication materials?
- What about the topic of reparations is important to your organization? How does it relate to your overall mission? How may it fit into our broader advocacy/policy/communication strategy?
- What relationships does the organization have with organizations and individuals who are embedded in the reparations movement already? Where can new relationships potentially be formed?
- Is there local policy or organizing work happening in your area? How, if at all, can your organization support that work?

Messages

- What are your staff's, particularly Black staff's, views on the topic of reparations? What questions do people have?
- Is there a specific area regarding reparations (economic, political, psychological, social, all of the above) that you see your organization's voice specifically fitting into?
- Who is your primary audience? How do they currently understand the topic of reparations?
- Are there messages from Reparations Narrative Lab members that resonate with you? If so, which and why?

Crafting Talking Point Suggestions:

- Frame the topic of reparations beyond monetary compensation/financial repair (while still emphasizing the importance of money and addressing the Black-white wealth gap).
- Remind audiences of the array of disparities that exist for Black communities in wealth, income, housing, education, healthcare, and incarceration—and that these disparities are a result of government action/inaction rooted in anti-Blackness.
- Remind audiences that white communities were able to grow wealth through government support (Homestead Act, GI Bill, home loans, etc) that Black people were systematically excluded from.
- Name uprooting anti-Blackness as a key goal that reparations seeks to achieve and is both a part of the journey toward reparations and a part of the destination that reparations will bring us toward.
- Discuss how other reparations efforts, both nationally and internationally, set a precedent for reparations for Black Americans.
    - Germany's reparations payments to Holocaust survivors

Messages

- The U.S. reparations compensation to Japanese-Americans for the unlawful incarceration during World War II

- Use affirming language and avoid reinforcing the narrative roadblocks and our opposition's frame.

- Highlight systemic problems and frame reparations for Black people as part of a broader suite of systemic solutions (which could also include universal policies like universal basic income, universal housing or other reparative solutions). It's important, particularly for policymakers, to understand reparations as not in opposition to other economic policy proposals but in addition to.

- Make unity, liberty, justice, and healing explicit outcomes of reparations while providing a clear picture of what reparations policies will deliver.[180] In addition to framing reparations as closing socioeconomic gaps, discuss the moral implications of reparations and the need to right our country's wrongs.[181]

- Consider framing reparations as a continual cycle instead of something that the U.S. can commit to for a short while.

- Be specific about how the history of anti-Blackness shows up in society, and its role as a key characteristic in U.S. culture. Show the relationship between structural racism and anti-Blackness.

[180] Beta Testing Report. Get Free.

[181] Repair and Reckoning Narrative Analysis for Global Messaging. Get Free.

DEEP NARRATIVES

The deep narrative level of the Narrative House signifies the themes that we envision being uplifted across stories related to reparations for Black people. Some of the other deep narratives named throughout our process included:

Unity	Care
Pride	Holistic

One of our inspirations for these deep narratives was the narrative system on immigrant narratives that were developed in the Butterfly Lab.

The Butterfly Lab identified six deep narratives they believe will "allow immigrant narrative workers to find alignment and consensus across projects and timelines, and to connect their work with other social movements."[182] Similarly, we see these deep narratives as areas for those focused on racial and economic justice to track the underlying themes that undergird our stories—and the Narrative House in its entirety as a tool for alignment.

[182] Chang, Jeff, Sen, Nayantara, Treibitz, Janelle, Abdullah, Sara, Hammon, Kana. A Future for All of Us. Butterfly Lab forImmigrant Narrative Strategy and Narrative Design Toolkit.

Deep Narratives

Some considerations when exploring this floor of the Narrative House are:

- What are the deep narratives that your organization currently employs?
- Is there a deep narrative named in the Narrative House that resonates with your organization or individual voice already?
- What deep narratives might resonate the most with your target audience?
- How can these deep narratives be woven throughout your storytelling and other communication materials?
- How can you make these deep narratives coherent in your daily work?
- Where might there be alignment in deep narratives across movements and/or issue areas?

TRACKING THE IMPACT OF THE NARRATIVE HOUSE

As it relates to impact, the key question at hand is how does the Narrative House and the array of narratives, stories, and messages that live within it spread across movements, and more importantly, within U.S. culture?

There are a number of factors that must be considered as we analyze the impact of the Narrative House, including a well-funded right-wing movement that is waging successful anti-history campaigns that are taking history about slavery out of classrooms, white nationalist groups that are committing terrorist attacks against Black communities, and of course, the lack of philanthropic dollars that flow to Black-led organizations and movements.

As such, shifting the narratives that stand in our way and replacing them with the different aspects of the Narrative House will take time. Tracking whether narratives are changing in the long-term will require significant and deep ethnographic research across the country that should be led by Black researchers. Nonetheless, we hope to continue to expand and detail our thinking about how to measure the impact of the Narrative House over the next few years. As our colleagues at ORS Impact note in their 2021 report Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity, "when measuring narrative change work, it can be tempting to get straight down to outcomes related to narratives themselves: are we seeing them change, in what ways, and with what effects."[183]

One simple way in which we'll track our impact is the amount of people and organizations who are using the Narrative House, to help them make sense of the

[183] Kalra, Nikki. Farfab Borgers, Ceilia. Robles, Leonor. Stachowiak, Sarah. Measuring Narrative Change: Understanding Progress and Navigating Complexity. 2021.

Tracking the Impact of the Narrative House

current narrative environment. We will seek to better understand how organizations are using it, what adjustments to the schematic are being made, and what new strategies are being created because of the Narrative House.

ORS has also outlined a helpful list of outcomes that we will start to analyze as the Narrative Lab continues to grow. We've used their original measurement framework and iterated on it for our purposes:

Relationships Across Movements: For the narratives that stand in the way of reparations to be overcome, the movement for reparations will have to grow. As such, more people and organizations will have to see themselves and actively participate in the movement. We hope that the Narrative House can be a tool for radical alignment and collaboration across organizations which we also hope will strengthen relationships at the individual and organizational level.

Organizational Narrative Capacity: While narrative change draws from capacities that we already see within organizations and teams (advocacy, communications, organizing, field-building, art and culture change, etc.) we hope with an increase in narrative strategies across the movement there will be more staff dedicated internally to narrative change work.

Tracking the Impact of the Narrative House

Digital Reach: While metrics like number of views, likes, and shares, do not tell you whether or not a piece of content is forwarding your narratives or resonating with your audiences, these pieces of data still provide a good high-level overview of how far and wide your piece of content was spread.

Media and Cultural Discourse: As ORS notes, "one area in which narrative change might become apparent is in shifts in public discourse." Through the popularization of our core narratives we hope to see a shift to a more holistic framing of reparations throughout the media.

Attitudes and Beliefs: Positive shifts in public opinion about reparations, particularly in non-Black communities, is one way in which we will know if the movement is effectively shifting the hearts and minds on this topic. In addition, since anti-Blackness and narratives around deservedness are so intertwined with this topic, we will also seek to measure how these notions are shifting within society from year to year.

Tracking the Impact of the Narrative House

Policies: Of course, narrative and policy go hand-in-hand, and while policy wins don't necessarily translate to long-term narrative wins, we know that each creation of a local reparations commission (for example) will add another proofpoint as to why reparations for the Black community is possible in this lifetime.

Institutional Practices and Power: We have seen various institutions, including universities like Harvard and Georgetown or media institutions like the *New York Times,* grapple with their role in slavery. A shift in institutional practices, particularly as it relates to narrative (name changes, confederate statue removals, etc) will be critical in sustaining long-term narrative change.

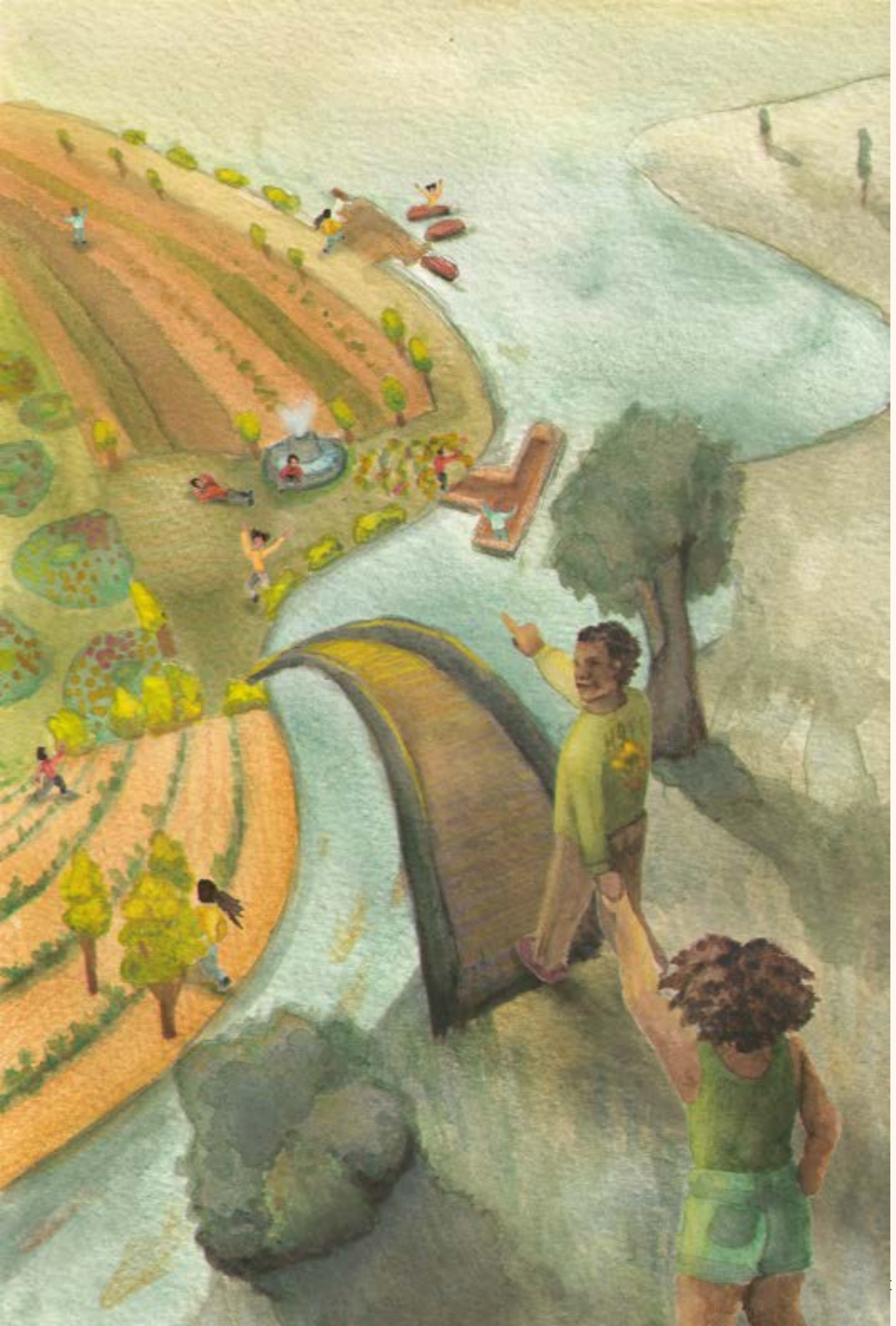
We'll need to track both short- and long-term impacts of narrative change efforts across the movement, public opinion at the national, state, and city levels, and the impact of the Narrative House on the broader racial justice movement more specifically.

As our friends at the Butterfly Lab note, "narrative is as important as policy," and deserves our attention as much as policy strategies do. To scale the type of measurement and impact analysis we need on a topic like reparations, philanthropic donors must step up to the plate and invest in narrative infrastructure so that movement actors can better understand how these narratives are reconstructing current understandings of reparations and increasing public support for the issue.

POETRY INTERLUDE:
DARE TO BE BLACK

By: Trevor Smith

We dare to Be Black.
In a world that spits in our faces each passing day,
We dare to Be Black.
In a world that longs for the time we swung from trees,
We dare to Be Black.
In a world that says we deserve less than less,
We dare to Be Black.
In a world that says we created this mess,
Yes, we dare to Be Black.
In a world that shutters when we assert that our lives matter,
Oh, we dare to Be Black.
In a world with no shame,
Lord, we dare to Be Black.
Entirely, deeply, wholly,
Perfectly, imperfect;
Head high, chest puffed,
We defiantly dare to Be Black.
In a world that loves to hate
Us,
We have no choice but to Be Black.
So we dare you,
Yes, you,
To Love us
In all of our bountiful, boastful, blissful,
Blackness.
For are we not living proof
Of the beauty to be found in scars?



CONCLUSION:
TOWARD A RADICAL NEW FUTURE

"Love is our hope and our salvation."

—bell hooks, *Salvation: Black People and Love*

It is an unfortunate fact that the indelible marks of slavery still exist within our laws, norms, and behaviors of today — the stains are soaked within the 400-year-old fabric of this nation. They manifest starkly in our policies and systems, evident in the cages we use to torture people, the persistence of widespread poverty, and the relentless violence targeting Black individuals. They exist within the confines of the daily interactions Black people endure, in the lingering gazes of white people, and at the backdrop of every story about race and the U.S. economy. They are stains that can never be completely erased, and yet, we collectively bear the responsibility to exhaust every possible effort in the pursuit of their removal.

As emphasized in this report, everything that we've socially constructed surrounding our understanding of race and anti-Blackness can and must be deconstructed. As Mariame Kaba and Andre J. Ritchie outline in their book, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition,* the work of organizers is three-fold:[184]

1) Help people understand the current reality
2) Collectively imagine a future vision of what can be
3) Diligently labor toward that future

[184] Kaba, Mariame, Ritchie, Andrea. No More Police: A Case for Abolition. August 30, 2022.

If this is the case, then the work of the reparations movement's mission must be to propel us toward a world devoid of anti-Blackness. Achieving this vision necessitates a radical and new grounding of principles and values. Individualism, and the lack of love we currently hold for each other, and for Black people particularly, has no place in the future world we are building.

If we envision our society to be grounded in a new form of radical love, then our movement too must be grounded in that same principle. As the esteemed writer and now ancestor, bell hooks, eloquently conveyed "we cannot effectively resist domination if our efforts to create meaningful, lasting personal and social change are not grounded in a love ethic."[185] In this context, we must conceive of love as both a feeling and a force of action. It is our responsibility to place love at the center of this movement and use it to propel others to action.

In other words, the work of reparations is the work of radical love.

It is the work of imposing a new frame with which to view society. One that assigns each of us with the task of dismantling oppression and repairing the harms of slavery and colonialism on a daily basis. Let this report serve as a loving invitation, a summons to all, to join the reparations movement. Join us in constructing a future that is profoundly distinct from the past --a future pulsating with hope, equity, and Black joy.

---

[185] Hooks, bell. All About Love: New Visions. December 22, 1999.

POETRY OUTRO:

EVERYTHING WILL BE RETURNED: *A REPARATIONS POEM*

By: malkia amala devich cyril

look at their mouths stuffed with cotton
throats full of blood and insatiable need
history their leaky faucet
their stain
their grief denied

it's capital that spreads
this cracked confederacy
barren and despite its dusty legacy
still alive
still stitched into everything we know
the smell of neo-fascism and slavery rises
a toxic smoke
a chemical fire

these are the sponsors of our breaking
a liturgical debt
gas-lit and lantern lawed
fanatical in their hunger for everything
that makes us holy
oh pirates/yes
they rob/I

and we
an extravagance of pain
a riot that cannot wait

a call from a future that knows
beyond the shadows
beyond the doubt
that down through the valley
through the centuries of ricocheted violence
we will live again
it's not too late

it is
a call from a future that knows
reparations are a reincarnated heat
knocking a ghost hand at the door
of a nation bred to die
a call from a future reborn
a future that knows
broken bonds and promises pillaged
require a stitch or nine through the skin
repair running a red river through it

it is
a call from a hungry future
a future that knows
death is history's portal
a future that listened
the night Sojourner whispered in my dream
WE WILL SPEAK
and if you burn down the house that platforms
our voice
we shall speak upon the ashes
word will have its witness
victory will have its world

it is
a call from a future that knows
everything
will be returned

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Kristina Mevs-Apgar

Lotte Dula

Nat Kendall-Taylor

Allistair Stephenson

Virginie Ladisch

Thomas Craemer

Lafayette Cruise

Rania Batrice

Erin Washington

Tsedey Betru

Terry Marshall

Yvette Shipman