



HIS STORY: **Shifting Narratives for** **Boys and Men of Color**

A GUIDE FOR PHILANTHROPY

EXECUTIVES'
ALLIANCE
FOR BOYS AND
MEN OF COLOR

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His Story: Shifting Narratives for Boys and Men of Color—A Guide for Philanthropy

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This toolkit was developed by Perception Institute and reflects the discussions and learnings from the 2015-2017 Narrative Change Collective Action Table of the Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color. Perception Institute served as lead consultant with the Narrative CAT and provided educational opportunities related to the mind sciences, narrative formation, and communications strategies.

We'd like to thank all members of the Collective Action Table for their contributions to this document and their continued participation in the Narrative Change CAT.

About the Executives' Alliance

The Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color is a network of more than 40 national, regional and community foundations committed to removing structural and systemic barriers so that boys and men of color can realize their full potential. EA members vary in their approach to this work, but they are bound by a shared commitment to increase economic, educational, civic-engagement, and wellness opportunities for boys and men of color, and remove the barriers that impede and harm them. funders4bmoc.org

About Perception Institute

Perception Institute is a consortium of researchers, advocates, and strategists that uses cutting-edge mind science research to reduce discrimination and other harms linked to race, gender, and other identity differences. Working in areas where bias has the most profound impact—education, health care, law enforcement and civil justice, and the workplace—they design interventions, evaluations, communications strategies, and trainings. Perception Institute turns research into remedies, crafting real-world solutions for everyday relationships. perception.org

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FOREWORD

Our brains are wired to be moved by stories. The stories we consume help us to make individual and collective sense of the world. Each narrative we know and hold shapes our perceptions, our beliefs, our decision-making, our behaviors, and our relationships.

As historical and recent events demonstrate, America's painful history of racism continues to drive undue levels of prosecution of boys and men of color and to deny them the opportunities and protections essential to their health, safety, education, and economic success. Narratives are part of this history, often mischaracterizing and shaping damaging perceptions of boys and men of color. Whether in their homes, their classrooms, their workplaces, or at play, boys and men of color constantly confront stereotypes that portray them as the suspect, not the achiever, as the taker, not the contributor. It can leave them feeling isolated, devalued and targeted, all while contributing to a downward spiral devoid of high aspirations for their futures. When a narrative completely dehumanizes a subset of society, it can cause even the most compassionate members of that society to conclude that the people in the subset deserve whatever happens to them.

The philanthropic field is in the business of creating positive social change. The list of priority issue areas that our foundations support is as diverse as it is long. Though there is an underlying and shared constant to our work – to advance meaningful, lasting change and ultimately create a more equitable world – we cannot support projects and programs alone. We must also take into consideration the narratives that surround and influence the people doing this work as well as the people affected by the work. These narratives have as much to do with a body of work's outcomes and effectiveness as with the work itself. Many times some of these narratives need to be challenged, thrown out, and replaced by more accurate and complete stories to facilitate long-term impact.

In the case of collective efforts by Executives' Alliance (EA) members to advance change for boys and men of color in education, the justice system, and our communities, the work to change narratives is and will continue to be essential. It is unacceptable that the positive and authentic stories of boys and men of color are insufficiently told, overshadowed by stories of challenges and failure. It is our responsibility to curate and share these stories of aspiration, accomplishment, and contribution to our communities and country. That's why EA members have collectively supported initiatives like the National Youth Alliance for Boys and Men of Color and the Fair Chance Hiring in Philanthropy Toolkit/Ban the Box Philanthropy Challenge, among others. Our support for these efforts is indicative of our belief that boys and men of color are worthy of opportunity, trust, and redemption. And they deserve to have their true stories heard. If people do not begin to hear stories that reflect these values and believe differently about those they perceive as different, they will continue to be influenced by the negative portrayals of our young people rather than the positive examples, of which there are many. We cannot expect the hearts and minds of those with negative perceptions to change by not sharing the truth. A question we must ask is: Whose truth is being told and by whom? This is where the work of narrative change begins.

This guide is a result of the work of the EA's Collective Action Table for Narrative Change. Our hope is that it will be an essential tool to support your foundation in understanding how the work of narrative change interweaves with programmatic and grantmaking efforts. Narratives exist all around us – in literature; in school curricula; in journalism and digital

media; in music, art, games, television, film and theatre; in places of worship; in museums, monuments, and parks. Whatever your foundation prioritizes for its grantmaking and related investments, there is always an entry point to this work and an opportunity to begin shifting narratives. This work is not easy, but it is necessary. It will take each and every one of us to utilize our power to ultimately improve the lives of the boys and men of color in our communities.



La June Montgomery Tabron
President & CEO,
W. K. Kellogg Foundation



William C. Bell
President & CEO,
Casey Family Programs

**“We believe
boys and men of color
are worthy of
opportunity, trust,
and redemption.
And they deserve to have their
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INTRODUCTION

This guide represents a milestone on a journey. In April 2015, members of the Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color (EA) gathered to contemplate a vision for co-designing a strategy to challenge racial hierarchy in the United States and its impact on boys and men of color. We envisioned impact across multiple domains, including education, health, and justice. This was a bold undertaking, although not a new idea. But we were buoyed by the political moment—riding the wave of national attention brought to issues impacting boys and men of color by the White House's My Brother's Keeper initiative and emboldened by the movement moment, as uprisings and the outcry against the killing of unarmed people of color began to shift public discourse and political realities nationwide. We knew the moment presented an opportunity, yet we also understood that it called for more and better approaches than had been tried before.

Collectively, we recognized that advancing change for boys and men of color would require deeper thinking, partnership, and strategy related to the narratives that surround and influence people's perceptions and, too often, define one's lived experience. Quite simply, we cannot advance racial justice, or the interests of boys and men of color, without addressing the narratives that surround them. We took this vision and began the work of developing a strategy.

The funders and allies involved in this work were participants of the EA's Narrative Change Collective Action Table (CAT), which included representation from over twenty foundations and philanthropic support and strategy organizations. Unlike the funders in tables focused on

specific policy issues, most funders in the CAT were new to the body of work we now refer to as "narrative change." As a result, we had varying ideas and understandings of what narrative change is and how it could be used most effectively. For example: some wanted to focus on fundable projects; others preferred to focus on strategic communications; still others preferred to leverage the influence of foundation presidents and CEOs as leaders. All are worthwhile approaches, reflecting very different tactics to create change.

Thus we decided that putting ideas into action should be prefaced by some level-setting and joint learning. The Narrative Change CAT, supported by Perception Institute, met throughout the spring, summer,

and fall of 2015 to build a learning community, which we called “Narrative University.” Our goal was to develop a shared framework for thinking about narrative change for boys and men of color and to identify levers for strategy and action. Perception Institute presented a mind science webinar to help us understand how the human brain embraces narratives driven by both implicit biases and the more recent explosion of overt racism. We created a syllabus of issues and materials and engaged some of the most knowledgeable and forward-thinking leaders in the field, ranging from Cathy Cohen of Black Youth Project and Rashad Robinson of Color of Change to Rinku Sen of Race Forward and the philanthropist, producer, and hip-hop artist Rhymefest. We convened with field leaders in February 2016 to name and clarify the “dragon” we need to slay—dominant racial narratives, the false notion of racial hierarchy, and internalized oppression. With key takeaways from our findings, and with lessons learned from our grantmaking along the way, we were ready to chart a path.

A few things happened along the way that demonstrated that the dragon we were trying to slay is as shape-shifting and elusive as it is powerful. The racialized rhetoric of the 2016 presidential campaign, the November election results, and the changed political climate ushered in a new sense of worry and created new battlegrounds seemingly overnight. If boys and men of color, their families, and their communities faced threats before, those threats quickly became more plentiful and more ominous. More killings of unarmed men of color have ravaged the nation. And a string of well-publicized incidents in which men and women of color have been falsely accused of or even arrested for trespassing (in places where they had every right to be present) remind us that that many still believe they do not “belong.” In addition, we began to see that some who had declared their support for boys and men of color were often unwittingly contributing to deficit-based narratives that focused on their plight instead of their promise. Moreover, many newcomers to the boys and men of color movement failed to center the leadership of young men of color—treating them as subjects of charity, consumers of services, and recipients of arms-length mentorship rather than as leaders, visionaries, and capable architects of their own liberation.

This all forced us to sharpen our approach. The result of that work is this guide on narrative change.

It is our hope that this guide will be a useful tool to demonstrate the central role that narratives play in the boys and men of color movement, and to help funders understand what drives the creation and expansion of narratives for different populations of boys and men of color. More practically, this guide is designed to help funders evaluate proposals and projects that seek to utilize narrative change as a part of their strategy, offering steps they can take in their grantmaking diligence processes when considering how to better support those who are furthering new narratives for boys and men of color. It offers examples of some impactful and promising projects already underway that can help shift or transform narratives. And it provides a shared vocabulary that can support the work inside of foundations and among their grantees.

We also want funders to understand that narrative change for boys and men of color is tough business that requires more of us than a standard approach. The work requires not only smart strategy, but also a personal investment in both the process and the outcomes. This work will stretch and challenge us. It is essentially part of a generations-long political project that cannot be completed within typical funding cycles. As such, its promise lies beyond grants that funders can move (as important as those are). It also has the promise to transform how we think about the movement for boys and men of color and even how we engage boys and men of color themselves as our sons, brothers, fathers, innovators, contributors, and leaders.

No toolkit will do this work on its own. We now have to do our part to make new narratives a reality. We hope you will join us on this journey.



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“Some who had **declared** their support for boys and men of color **were often** unwittingly contributing to **deficit-based narratives** that focused on their **plight** instead of their **promise.**”

This toolkit was developed using the following guiding principles that define our work:

Promoting Assets over Deficits: Framing narratives by recognizing the successes and potential of boys and men of color, rather than their challenges and limitations.

Centering Authentic Local Voices: Featuring authentic local voices, especially of young men of color, which demonstrate that new and expanded narratives about boys and men of color are more than an aspiration—they're already a reality and within our reach.

Recognizing the Role of Individual Agency and Systemic Transformation: Presenting narratives that speak to both the role of individuals and the role of the systems around them (education, justice, health care, etc.) in driving positive outcomes.

Leading with Humanity: While focusing on individual stories and systemic successes, reminding people that the very humanity of people of color is so often ignored by dominant narratives; that the fates of boys and men of color are inextricably linked to the fates of women and girls of color; and that shifting or expanding dominant narratives and healing racial divides is a moral obligation of our shared humanity and an opportunity for essential, impactful societal advancement.

Measuring Progress Rigorously: Ensuring that the narratives we nurture can be linked to signs of success so that we know the work is making progress.

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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

His Story: Shifting Narratives for Boys and Men of Color provides grantmakers interested in transforming the harmful and negative perceptions in our communities with an overview of why investing in narrative change work is critical. Narrative change work has been a key component of every successful movement for social and racial justice, and this toolkit highlights the researchers, strategists, and storytellers leading the current efforts to reimagine the lived experiences and possibilities of boys and men of color. For many funders, engaging or investing in narrative and culture change work can feel abstract or overwhelming compared to traditional racial justice interventions. This toolkit deconstructs narrative change work into distinct domains that stand on their own as strategies but together form a picture of narrative change work and how it takes shape around boys and men of color.

With input and feedback from experts across the field, we hope *His Story: Shifting Narratives for Boys and Men of Color* will increase awareness of the power and importance of transforming narratives for boys and men of color and serve as a critical resource guide that compiles key knowledge, analysis, and resources in one place for grantmakers seeking to invest their time, talent, and treasure in narrative change work. In addition, this toolkit summarizes current schools of thoughts around narrative strategies dominating the field, provides specific case studies of projects that have helped transform narratives, and makes recommendations for grantmakers as they consider projects for future funding around narratives.

IN THIS TOOLKIT

Section 1 sets forth THE CHALLENGE. Currently, boys and men of color are seen largely through the lens of negative stereotypes supported by dominant narratives and the various mechanisms that ingrain these narratives in our brains and societal structures. This section explains why harmful narratives around boys and men of color continue to persist and why prevailing approaches to tackle racial disparities and gaps fall short.

Section 2 identifies A SOLUTION. Narrative change work is critical to overturning the negative representations around boys and men of color. This section delves into the different strategies and frameworks that will transform narratives and serve as a tool for social change.

Section 3 describes HOW TO ADVANCE NARRATIVE CHANGE. Various sectors and domains comprise the narrative change ecosystem and need to be engaged for effective narrative change work to happen. This section provides a deeper look at narrative change strategies and cites examples from current narrative change makers.

Section 4 provides RECOMMENDATIONS and TOOLS for philanthropy. This section provides grantmakers with actionable questions, tools, and strategies they can employ to expand opportunities for boys and men of color.

Throughout the toolkit, we've featured insights from practitioners in the field in **first-person reflections**. Additionally, we've provided a **glossary** of terms and additional resources from the growing field of narrative change practitioners for further education.





THE CHALLENGE

THE PERSISTENCE OF FALSE AND HARMFUL NARRATIVES ABOUT BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR

The tragic, brutal, and untimely deaths of boys and men of color in the last few years reinforce an all-too-familiar feeling: being a male of color in the United States is perilous. What boys and men of color are experiencing in the real world, we also know, does not veer too far from what's happening in the narratives that have come to shape the lived experience for many boys and men of color. Stories that “dehumanize” young men of color and question their value to society abound. And stories that “super-humanize” the physical characteristics of boys and men of color create fear and distrust. The common denominators in these stories are dominant narratives—stories about boys and men of color that are distorted, repeated, and amplified through media platforms, both traditional media and social media, which fuel negative and vilifying perceptions and bring them to scale. In our work, we’ve come to define these **dominant narratives** as the “dragon” we are trying to “slay.” This section will help us understand the psychological processes in our brains and the phenomena that underlie the dominant narratives about boys and men of color.

In order to slay the dragon, we first need to understand what a narrative is, how it becomes dominant, and then how current narratives cause harm to our boys and men of color. A **narrative** is a spoken or written account of connected events. In other words, it is a story we tell to make meaning. Narratives become dominant through repetition, particularly when told about a minority culture through the lens of the ruling culture.

Dominant narratives inform how a majority of people in society perceive and interact with one another. They are comprised of stories and archetypes that portray people of different races and ethnicities—Black, Latino, Asian, or Native American—as caricatures rather than distinct and unique human beings. For boys and men of color, the stereotypes may differ depending upon the particular race or ethnicity and historical context, but for each group, these stereotypes are distorted and limiting. Think, for example, of Black and Latino men and how stereotypes depict them as dangerous, threatening, and poor. In contrast, the dominant narratives of white men portray them as hardworking, industrious, innovative, and successful.

Dominant narratives, while constantly evolving, are rooted in the racial history of the United States, specifically the parts of that history that we do not often discuss, such as slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and other times of racial bias. As we describe in more detail below, the effects of being defined by a dominant narrative infuse every aspect of life for boys and men of color, from housing and education to health care and career opportunities, making them more vulnerable to violence and more likely to end up in jail.

Dominant narratives about boys and men of color can also trigger or be reinforced by **internalized negative self-perceptions** among community members. The stories we tell about each other influence the stories we see in ourselves, making our narrative challenges both interrelated and mutually reinforcing—the external reinforcing the internal and vice versa. But it is often the dominant narrative that does the most work in driving how others see boys and men of color and how they see themselves. While this toolkit focuses on boys and men of color, these same processes are also applicable to narratives about other populations, including women and girls of color.

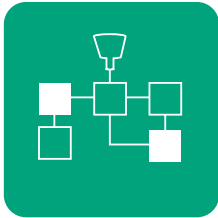
The Mechanisms Underlying Dominant Narratives

Dominant narratives are supported by at least three primary phenomena, that inform and influence one another. First is the **distortion and underrepresentation** of boys and men of color in the media and in popular culture, which further entrench false and damaging narratives. The second is what social scientists call **schemas**—the processes by which our unconscious brain makes sense of information—which, when applied to people, can overwhelm our conscious anti-racist values and render even well-intentioned people and communities vulnerable to engaging in biased behavior. These are exacerbated by a third phenomenon: **echo chambers** and similar mechanisms that reinforce and calcify dominant narratives. Together, these phenomena do the same work and damage as overt racism. In some ways, however, they are more pernicious and more difficult to root out because they have become so intricately hardwired into our brains.



Distortions and Underrepresentation

America's lens into what it means to be a male of color is both narrow and blurry. Boys and men of color are underrepresented in popular culture and in the media. When they are represented, it is frequently through exaggerated, negative images connected to criminality, boastful sexual prowess, unemployment, and poverty. The few “positive” depictions are often underdeveloped, lacking in nuance, limiting excellence to sports or music, and framed as “exceptional.” This includes portrayals in news and journalism as well as: advertising, TV shows, movies, and video games.



Schemas

Psychological research demonstrates that the brain is constantly engaging in the process of sorting information into categories, creating associations, and filling in information gaps. Through these processes, the brain creates schemas—the frames through which our brains understand and navigate the world. We rely on these schemas on a daily basis. Social categories, such as race, gender, and religion, and their stereotypes, comprise some of our brain's most powerful subconscious schemas. The schemas related to boys and men of color are often linked to criminality, poverty, hostility to education, and problem behavior. Structural factors such as racial segregation, education and income opportunity gaps, disparate contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems, and the knowledge (and even expectation) of statistics revealing stark racial disparities all reinforce these stereotypes, particularly among people who do not have the information or incentive to counter them. The juxtaposition of schemas and structural inequities bolsters the dominant narratives about boys and men of color, insinuating not only that these narratives are based in fact but also that they arise from individual failures and poor choices.



Echo Chambers

Echo chambers are situations in which ideas or information are repeated within a closed system. Your social media feed, for example, can function as an echo chamber if the people you follow are likely to hold the same views you do. In an echo chamber, ideas are reinforced because they are the only ideas people are hearing; competing views are disregarded or drowned out. Echo chambers cause people to converge on singular attitudes, narrowing a collective worldview. They also exacerbate a problem known as **confirmation bias**—a cycle in which people tend to find, interpret, remember, and believe information that confirms or reinforces pre-existing beliefs, while avoiding or rejecting information that might contradict them. Thus, if we receive only one point of view in an echo chamber, we may actually seek to confirm this view when we are outside of it. Although we may not realize when we are becoming part of an echo chamber, our actions can contribute directly to its construction. The related term “filter bubble,” coined by Upworthy founder Eli Pariser, explains how our choices, particularly online, can block out ideas and experiences that are different from our own. Just like those on the “other” side whom we may view as ideologues, we can start to believe the bubble we inhabit is the one true reality. The result is a woeful lack of open-mindedness—our preconceived notions solidify and harden, blinding us to others' perspectives and polarizing our culture.¹



The Impact of Dominant Narratives

Dominant narratives of boys and men of color constrain how we perceive their potential and limit our expectations of them. In a sense, narratives become reality as boys and young men of color have their opportunities for advancement truncated throughout their lives. As boys, they are irrationally perceived as threatening rather than innocent; as students, they are labeled as disruptive rather than recognized for their academic potential; as job applicants, they are disproportionately passed over, sometimes for less-qualified candidates.

At the same time, boys of color are more likely than their peers to attend schools that have fewer experienced educators² and lack resources.³ They are less likely to emerge from high school prepared for college⁴ and less able to compete for good jobs⁵ or access startup capital for business ventures.⁶ Most unjustifiably--and shamefully for the broader culture around them--they experience extremely high levels of contact with the juvenile⁷ and criminal justice systems.⁸ In moments of crisis, dominant narratives lead to the assumption that the behavior of boys of color must be harmful and deadly, which in turn precipitates unjust and dangerously false interpretations of this behavior. When held as a society, dominant narratives both mirror and, perversely, provide justification for the scant allocation of institutional resources for boys and men of color, limiting their opportunities and providing system-wide barriers to their success.

All of these factors can also lead to internalized racism or internalized oppression,⁹ causing boys and men of color to see themselves through

the lens of the false dominant narratives that limit their opportunity and shape their lives. As Professor Laura Padilla has noted,

*Internalized oppression and racism are insidious forces that cause marginalized groups to turn on themselves, often without even realizing it. The combined effect of internalized oppression and internalized racism is often devastating—it can reinforce self-fulfilling negative stereotypes, resulting in self-destructive behavior.*¹⁰

Donna Bivens has described the phenomenon further:

*Because internalized racism is a systemic oppression, it must be distinguished from human wounds like self-hatred or “low self esteem,” to which all people are vulnerable. It is important to understand it as systemic because that makes it clear that it is not a problem simply of individuals. It is structural. Thus, even people of color who have “high self-esteem” must wrestle with the internalized racism that infects us, our loved ones, our institutions, and our communities.*¹¹

This last point is a crucial reminder that as we pursue our work, we must be mindful that dominant narratives affect communities internally as well as externally. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy given the far reach and impact of media with the advancement of technology. For this reason, we can no longer have separate messages for an internal and external audience; rather, narrative change work must effectively address both audiences collectively and consistently.

“**Advocates** should be aware of the **missteps, or insufficiencies,** in every stage of the narrative-building process so that we can foster **open-mindedness** and **collaboration** rather than cause further polarization.”

Framing and the Limits of Traditional Responses

Given what we know about how dominant narratives and the damage they can inflict, why can we not seem to do more to address them? The simple answer is that the go-to approaches we have used for decades are either outdated or ineffective to address the scale of the challenge. In fact, they can even backfire on us.

Since the Civil Rights Movement, three major innovations in communications and thinking about race and racism have furthered our understanding about how race functions in our society and provided the basis for our appeals beyond the civil rights community for progressive policies and changes in practice:

- **Disparity Documentation:** data-driven analysis used to demonstrate the lack of full inclusion of people of color in society.
- **Structural Analysis of Policy and Opportunity:** recognition that racial and economic inequalities stem from policies that determine institutional opportunities or create exclusionary barriers for people of color.
- **Intersectionality:** recognition of the complex means by which marginalization and oppression operate in a person's everyday life as a result of embodying multiple interconnected and overlapping stigmatized social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

While these approaches are critical to analysis and determining policy positions, they can be detrimental to the work of persuading the broader public that the policy position should be adopted. These approaches are not only insufficient to challenge dominant narratives, they may reinforce them. Egalitarian thinking has prevailed, yet our unconscious mind, which determines most of our behavior, remains highly influenced by stereotypes, racial anxiety, and preference for the dominant in-group (Appendix A defines these and other concepts). Our data, history, and logic are sound; however, social science research over the past two decades tells us that we need to move beyond the rational in order to compel change.

As a result, these approaches—which have helped paint a broad portrait of the experiences of people of color in America—cannot translate data

into a sense of moral urgency or empathy. With competing explanations for racial gaps and disparities, they do not inspire those not affected directly by racial bias to create change. They do not help manage racial anxiety or racial tension, which seem to have spiked in recent years.¹² And most importantly, they can create a sense of inevitability or intractability of racial subordination within communities of color that triggers hopelessness and despair.^{13 14}

When emotions and fear are primary drivers of human behavior, “rationality” becomes irrelevant. To be successful in persuading others, we must affirm the centrality of emotions and values in our reactions to race and gender. We need to create a meaningful cultural shift in the conversation about race when ideas about race are entrenched in both our discourse and language (prompting predictable reactions) and also in our unconscious minds.

Advocates should be aware of the missteps, or insufficiencies, in every stage of the narrative-building process so that we can foster open-mindedness and collaboration rather than cause further polarization. Through this work, then, we need to build upon, supplement, critique—and most importantly not be limited to—the frames we have used in the past.

On the following page are some often-used frames derived from our policy-driven approaches that have been developed over the years. Each has done valuable and important work in the fight against racism. But each frame also has accompanying challenges or limitations that can impede the narrative expansion we seek.

The frames described are critical components of our work: we must teach more accurate history; “whiteness as a default” is a reality we must address; identifying and building upon our shared values will be part of coalition building; and we must work to prevent the harms that stem from both implicit and explicit biases. However, these frames are inadequate and incomplete. The focus of our shared work is to create opportunities for sustained behavior change. If our current frames haven't been effective in challenging the distorted perceptions and dominant narratives about boys and men of color and people of color overall—and evidence suggests we have not—we need to find new approaches.

| FRAME | LIMITATION |
|-------------------|---|
| HISTORICAL LENS | History is often discussed in the abstract—our brains do not engage emotions and allow others to feel empathy. As a result, many Americans know little about the true horrors of centuries of racism in this country and focus instead on the commercially-accepted, “sanitized” versions of racial history. Moreover, leading with history can create a psychic distance from present-day circumstances and lead to a default “I am not to blame” response. |
| STRUCTURAL RACISM | Discussions of structural racism have the enormous advantage of de-emphasizing the search for individual “racists,” emphasizing the role of policies and institutions rather than individual “bad actors.” Yet, for individuals who are not policy experts, discussions of structural racism can seem abstract and difficult to grasp, especially absent exposure to the voices and stories of directly-impacted people who can add a personal dimension to the discussion. Furthermore, the term doesn’t recognize that institutions are, in fact, created and managed by people. |
| WHITE PRIVILEGE | Some white people don’t consider themselves beneficiaries of privilege of any sort and therefore can be hostile and reactive to the idea of white privilege. For people who are economically and culturally not part of the white elite, this feeling is not surprising. Either way, it often triggers individual defensiveness, which shuts down understanding and dialogue. As a result, the concept of white privilege alone cannot increase empathy and change the way white people engage people of color. |
| SHARED VALUES | Most Americans value equality; finding practices that call upon our shared values is a critical lens to advancing a larger sense of belonging. Invoking shared values, however, is not adequate in highly charged racial incidents because they can minimize the differences experienced by communities of color rather than acknowledge the power of those differences in lived experience. |
| IMPLICIT BIAS | This concept has gained increasing visibility in the last several years. It is grounded in mind science research and acknowledges the limitation of self-reporting. It creates a connection to the individual experience of race and does not presume intent but rather presumes explicit egalitarianism. It can be a disarming entry point into racial dialogue. However, it is at best a diagnosis of perception and not a solution, let alone a silver bullet. The notion that ‘we all hold implicit biases’ is true, but insufficient to shift the dominant narrative. |
| EXPLICIT BIAS | America is experiencing a re-awakening about racism. Since the 2016 elections, stories about race-or newly emboldened white supremacists—have become much more explicit and overt. Frames that lead with explicit bias, meaning those that directly and causally link race and behavior, leave unacknowledged the broader systems-level issues and obstacles experienced by boys and men of color. Naming explicit bias is an important framing strategy, both to highlight the immorality of such positions and to invite potential listeners to make a conscious choice to distance themselves from the sentiment. That said, naming explicit bias can also encourage defensiveness and make it difficult to draw in people from across the spectrum to encourage perspective-taking. |



RASHID SHABAZZ

Chief Marketing and Storytelling Officer, Color of Change

There is a long history of conversations involving cultural critiques and content creators interrogating the role and power of perception and narrative and the impact it has on Black people and boys and men of color more broadly. I root my own interrogation and processing of narrative change to the work of Marlon Riggs and his two documentaries *Ethnic Notions* (1987) and *Color Adjustment* (1991). *Ethnic Notions* looked at the impact anti-Black and racist stereotypes were having on the ways the general public perceived African Americans, and *Color Adjustment* ties the history of African American presence on television alongside the rise of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. These documentaries began to address the history of cultural markers that continue to inform our own implicit and explicit biases related to Black men and boys and Black people specifically.

From a philanthropic reference point, the early investments by the African American Men and Boys Initiative (AAMBI), led by Dr. Bobby Austin at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation from 1992-2001, had a narrative change or storytelling component of the work that was supported and directed by another philanthropic leader, Trabian Shorters. I think it is important to connect these early historical reference points to inform the current work. There is no coincidence that Trabian, who was part of the AAMBI (or what some called the Village Foundation), began BMe Community, or that the Kellogg Foundation, with a history of supporting narrative-related work for Black men and boys, would later launch a focus on racial healing that had in its strategy a key focus on using narrative change to address implicit bias.

Between 2006 and 2009, the Ford Foundation, under the direction of Loren Harris and with support from Frontline Solutions, developed a series of reports that began to provide a framework for philanthropy to discuss the issue of Black men and boys as a population that needed investments. From the beginning of this work, there were questions on how to message or best tell the story about why Black men and boys and young men of color should matter to a funder or even to the broader public. Ford provided funding to a former Black-led funding intermediary called the Twenty-First Century Foundation. In 2008, they produced and distributed a film called *Bring Your "A" Game*. This was the first example of a project that I am familiar with that was philanthropically driven and engaged cultural influencers such as Sean "Puffy" Combs and Mario Van Peebles to help drive behavioral change directed towards young Black men specifically.

My general sense was that the Twenty First Century Foundation did not see this film, or its work at the time, as narrative change, but more as a tool to drive public awareness and behavior change for the young men they were trying to impact and to also increase investments in the work. When I joined Open Society Foundations in 2009, I tried to find as much information that I could gather around the history of investments for Black men and boys and perception change. I quickly learned that there had been very limited investment in research from within philanthropy tied to a strategy focus on narrative change and Black men and boys. Most of the information I found was conducted either through university-based research or through the art world. I referenced, for example, Thelma Golden's *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (1994) and also Robert Entman's *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (2000). These two books provided a grounding for me to marry what I had been studying through the work of Marlon Riggs and all the other cultural tools and resources from films, television, and music that I had been absorbing my entire life.

Prior to OSF, I began to have conversations with Marcus Littles at Frontline Solutions about the possible implications of using communications and storytelling/narrative to drive perception change. Working as a senior account executive at Fenton Communications, I began to draft and co-author a thought-paper with my close colleague and friend Robert Perez. The piece we eventually wrote was called *Seize The Moment: Reframing the Story of Black Males in the Media* (2009). The premise of this short industry guide was to suggest that the ascendancy of Barack Obama as America's first Black male president provided us an opportunity that we never had before: to drive a narrative and perception change effort to transform the ways we see young Black men and boys.

At the heart of the idea was trying to maximize the Obama Presidency to drive a public policy and philanthropic discourse around boys. It was my belief that in order to change policy you must first also contend with and change culture and perceptions. You don't change policy if the old frameworks and applications apply. If you believe Black men and women are representative of how they are portrayed on television, we will have a draconian and punitive criminal justice system and laws that demean, dehumanize, and devalue us. Negative and inaccurate perceptions and

narratives of people of color are the pillars of white supremacy, racial discrimination, and bias. As Thelma Golden writes in *Black Male*, "The challenge of representing and questioning the image of the Black male is great. Black masculinity suffers not just from overrepresentation, but oversimplification, demonization, and (at times) utter incomprehension." In other words, white supremacy and racial hierarchies force Black people every day to, as Marlon Riggs once said, "constantly remind ourselves that we are not an abomination." For these reasons, we began to frame our narrative change work around asset-based framing versus deficit framing. I was never a supporter of terms that described young men of color as disconnected or marginalized. These words suggested that they were somehow in need of fixing or correcting. I preferred the use of words that affirmed our richness, brilliance, achievement, hope, assets, treasures, resources, centeredness, and connectedness. Though we cannot ignore the reality of structural and institutional barriers and the real challenges we face as Black men and boys or young men of color, we don't have to live by the labels. Reframing and shifting narratives are essential tools of empowerment and reclaiming stories.

To drive this effort around narrative change, Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) began to invest in those areas to fill the gaps of information and research that were missing around narrative change and Black men and boys. In 2010, we partnered with Alexis McGill Johnson at Perception Institute and the Knight Foundation to launch a series called *Black Male: Re-Imagined*. *Black Male: Re-Imagined* brought together thinkers, leaders, practitioners, activists, journalists, cultural influencers, and philanthropists to discuss campaign strategies to re-imagine Black men in American media and reshape the narratives that contribute to distorted perceptions of Black men and boys. We have since hosted two additional *Black Male: Re-Imagined* gatherings, with each event taking on new themes and voices to share their insights on narrative change. In 2011, CBMA and Open Society Foundations also invested in The Opportunity Agenda to develop reports and a toolkit on public opinion research about media depiction and consumption of Black men and boys' images and stories. With this information and research material, we were able to create and provide a framework for strategy on why narrative change mattered. Simultaneously other foundations were beginning to lead their own efforts. The Heinz Endowment in 2011 released a report on local Pittsburgh news entitled *Portrayal and Perception: Two Audits of News Media Reporting on African American Men and Boys*. Both analyses concluded that a disproportionate amount of Pittsburgh news coverage of African American men and boys focused on crime. The research helped to encourage local media to broaden their coverage of Black men and boys and to support projects that put media in the hands of young men, enabling them to tell their own stories and to challenge those told about them.



EDDY ZHENG

Co-Director, Asian Prisoner Support Committee



How would you define “narrative change” for boys and men of color?

First, narrative change involves creating a platform for boys and men of color to be able to share their stories. The second is how do we validate the experiences of boys and men of color? And finally, shifting the way we think about boys and men of color.

How do you define and identify the challenges around changing dominant narratives, particularly around boys/men of color?

It goes back to the challenge of trying to convince the mainstream that there are specific unaddressed needs for the API community. People often buy into the “model minority myth,” which prevents them from fully understanding the challenges facing API communities as well as other communities of color. But even within the API community, there are many community members who want to maintain the model minority myth and don't want to associate with other communities of color/ BMOC issues.

Do you use your storytelling/communications work to challenge narratives (either directly or indirectly)? If so, what is your approach/method?

When I was in prison (for 21 years), I had the rare opportunity to interact with volunteers from the outside. They got to know me, not just what the media or law enforcement told them about long-term prisoners. When they got to know me, they saw the humanity in me—that I'm just a regular individual. That is the experience of many volunteers in the prison system: with exposure there is an opportunity for transformation. With the Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC), we try to cultivate more opportunities for community members to get to know the humanity of people who are behind bars: through documentary films (such as *Breathin': the Eddy Zheng Story* and *Life After Life*), books (*Other: an API Prisoners' Anthology*), and social media.

What is the affirmative and/or more complex narrative of BMOC and or Asian communities that you are trying to advance?

Many of my peers in the prison system and immigration detention originally came to this country as refugees fleeing from war-torn countries. I feel that many of the Southeast Asian communities are not included in the narrative of boys and men of color—the intergenerational trauma, PTSD, and, in some cases, the genocide they face in their home countries. Once we understand and address the historical struggles of API folks (and other communities), we can better advance the narratives aligned with racial justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQ equality, and more.

How does your own personal narrative fit into your vision for narrative change and your work?

Everything I do is based on my personal experiences and passion for narrative change. As someone who spent 21 years in prison, since I was 16 years old, I had to create my own platform to advocate for myself and others for narrative change. Some of the highlights of my work occur when people come together and find commonalities between BMOC communities to shift the way we think in relation to equity and racial inclusion.

Who are other writers/content creators that you think of as “narrative change-makers”?

I feel fortunate to have my story (and my family's) told in documentary film format, through *Breathin': the Eddy Zheng Story*, directed by Ben Wang. The film has been a useful tool to raise awareness about issues of stigma and shame in the API community dealing with mass incarceration and deportation. The film was screened on public television and at film festivals, shown through the PBS app, and screened at colleges across the US. My work with APSC has benefitted from the film, cultivating more volunteers, supporters, and partners through screenings.

If you were advising funders/the philanthropic community on investing in narrative change, what would you like them to know?

I think philanthropy should fund narrative change because it will empower marginalized communities to uplift their lived experiences, heal intergenerational trauma, and advance BMOC issues. By funding narrative change, they could take a leadership role in dispelling the model minority myth and creating platforms to find commonalities between BMOC communities.





A SOLUTION

NARRATIVE CHANGE AND NARRATIVE EXPANSION

With strategic interventions by a willing coalition of people, it is possible to create narratives about boys and men of color that reflect the full spectrum of their lived experiences and contributions. The goal is narrative change that incorporates both pushback on distortion and misrepresentations and narrative expansion that elevates the wide range of success, assets, and attributes currently invisible about boys and men of color. More expansive narratives help the brain make new associations and schemas, form new neural pathways, and challenge the unconscious phenomena that cause even well-intentioned people to discriminate against and fear boys and men of color. To be clear, narrative change in and of itself will not dismantle structural racism, but narrative change is one strategy that undergirds the dismantling of structural racism.



Rather than strictly **focusing** our attention on **narrative shifts**, we should also be thinking about **narrative expansion**. Sometimes narrative expansion is **more important**, likely and measurable than narrative shift. So we should **move away** from the idea that there is “**a**” narrative that we all **agree on**, or that it should be purely positive, but instead the goal should be to **increase** and **expand** representation.



—Cathy J. Cohen, Author and activist

Why Narratives?

We all recognize the detrimental impact of the current dominant narratives of boys and men of color. Many of us have tried to counter these distorted narratives with data and analysis. However, narratives are stories and as a result, are rarely amenable to change through such rational channels.

Research from the fields of neuroscience and psychology reveal that our brains act in specific ways when we are hearing stories. These cognitive processes are part of what make these narratives so intractable—and provide further evidence as to why we must take a narrative approach if we hope to upend our society's attitudes, perceptions, and treatment toward boys and men of color.

So let's take a simple example. In our society, there is an almost universal fear of sharks. Why? Many Americans have never even been swimming in the ocean, yet they claim to be afraid of sharks. This fear is heavily rooted in the narrative of the lone rogue shark, seeking out humans blood. The notion of the “killer shark,” who can't wait to chomp on your legs in the water, was catapulted to prominence by the classic film *Jaws* and has become entrenched in our social unconscious. And yet, the reality is that we each have a 1 in 3.7 million chance of being killed by a shark. But here's the thing—you're probably more likely to remember the plot of the movie *Jaws* than to remember this statistic about the likelihood of a deadly shark attack. When we try to counter the barrage of stories depicting boys and men of color as criminals with accounts of structural racism, it is the neurological equivalent of using statistics to override the fear of sharks.

Neuroscience explains this phenomenon. When we analyze how our brains function, research shows that narrative stories require less semantic processing than strict facts and data. So, stories are easier for our brains to understand and require less attention to retain essentially the same information. Part of this is because we are used to hearing stories. We have been listening to stories since before we knew how

to speak them ourselves. Over many years of training, our brains have become familiar with narrative forms, and stories are an easy way for our brains to receive information.

Research also shows that our brains are programmed to seek the structure and components of narratives. We come to expect a protagonist, a conflict, a villain, and for good to triumph over evil. Narratives that follow this sequence are easier for our brains to understand—and the media knows that. So the stories we see in mass media—both news and entertainment—are woven to fit this model. In many cases, these stories are at the expense of the full humanity of boys and men of color. With the fixed structure of narratives, our brains are actually able to infer themes that are woven throughout, beyond just the series of events in the story. We can imagine that when these themes run through multiple narratives, they are reinforced in our minds, even if their message is not explicit. The brain's ability to pick up on themes from stories, which would not come through when reading a series of statistics, points to why the dominant narratives are so effective in painting boys and men of color with broad strokes related to criminality and violence. People get the message even when the message isn't delivered explicitly. And they believe the message even when it isn't true.

Finally, when we read or hear a story, our brains are highly engaged. Research even shows that our brains have an actual physiological response to the experience of a story's characters. The ability to draw people into a story presents a critical and unique opportunity to shift perceptions. The mental engagement that comes with listening to a story means that our brains are primed for more effective perspective-taking. Using narrative, therefore, can allow broader communities to think deeply about the actual experiences of boys and men of color. Storytelling is also acknowledged as a critical exercise in building empathy and critical thinking skills and in understanding the world in more nuanced ways. We can capitalize on the power of narratives to reframe how we perceive and understand boys and men of color.



Narrative change is ... a fundamental rewiring of what we **believe.**



Narrative Change vs. Strategic Communications

Although a narrative change strategy may include elements of communications (a clear, powerful, resonant message, a leader or set of leaders, etc.), it is not the same as a communications plan.

Narrative change is a long-term process relying on storytelling (visual and written) as a method of disrupting the dominant belief structures that undergird social and racial hierarchy. Strategic communications is typically an immediate actionable plan that expresses the goals and methods of a movement or an institution's outreach and engagement activities within a particular moment or set of moments.

Our brains fill in gaps of information with what we already know, and as a result the stores of information in our brains are often incomplete or incorrect. The work of strategic communications tries to correct the record by providing honest and accurate information. Communication is the development of shared understanding; it can help raise awareness and move people to action. It's about influencing the conversation at the conscious- or surface-level and correcting what we think we know.

Narrative change is deeper than that; it's a fundamental rewiring of what we believe. It involves an entire ecosystem that goes deeper than our movements' historic strategies around public relations and earned media to engage scientists, teachers, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, activists, employers, and more. Narrative change is about mobilizing all of these sectors to tell new and expanded stories about boys and men of color, and to fundamentally change how we feel about and treat this group in the long term.

Jeff Chang, a culture change strategist and founder of CultureStrike and Colorlines, describes social change as oceanic waves: "We think of a wave as an event. But by definition, it is a motion and a process. We think of change as events, as well – elections and demonstrations. But it's important also to remember it as a process. Culture is like the ocean, with many invisible forces pushing back and forth. Cultural change always precedes political change."¹⁵ Chang provides an interesting way of thinking about culture change that can similarly be applied to narrative change work. We can think about strategic communications work as surfing the ocean wave and narrative change as creating the wave.¹⁶ We need to have the ability to respond to incoming waves while also

doing the deeper work of managing the many forces contributing to and building these waves. With time, we are able to have greater control and predictability over how these waves look and improve our response accordingly. In this way, a strong communications strategy can aid and reinforce the fundamental rewiring that happens through narrative change.

To illustrate the difference between narrative change and communications strategy, we can look at them in the context of two areas of great concern to the boys and men of color movement: policing and justice, and education.

The underlying goal of the movement for policing and justice reform is to build safe communities for everyone, including people of color. Ultimately, communities and police are safer if mutual respect and trust replaces hostility and suspicion on both sides. The short-term, strategic communications piece of this effort might highlight cases of police brutality and advocate for certain reforms, such as body-worn cameras or the end of stop-and-frisk practices, but also positive examples of police-community partnerships. But the long-term, narrative effort must be designed to change the underlying schema that people of color constitute a threat—and thus that the primary goal of policing is to protect the "good" people (unconsciously or sometimes consciously presumed to be white) from the "thugs" and criminals (unconsciously or sometimes consciously presumed to be Black, Latino, or Muslim).

In education, the underlying goal is for schools to be places that challenge, inspire, and engage all children in an atmosphere in which they will thrive. A short-term communications strategy might highlight data demonstrating gross racial disparities in school suspensions and expulsions, as well as disparities in student "achievement" and resources allocated to particular schools. In addition, it is important to disaggregate race and class so that the image of all Black and Latino students as universally poor and struggling is challenged. However, the long-term narrative effort must be designed to change the underlying schema that children of color are inherently "deficient" or "unruly" or present challenges that white students do not. The idea is to create a narrative that says all our children are curious, capable, and enthusiastic to learn—and that they all deserve a fair opportunity to learn. Again, the communications strategy is part of the narrative strategy; they are not the same.



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

NARRATIVE CHANGE

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

- Short term
- Engagement with an audience in a particular moment
- Corrects the record with accurate information
- Influences the conversation at the surface level
- Surfing the wave

NARRATIVE CHANGE

- Long term
- Ongoing engagement with an entire ecosystem of people in multiple fields
- Fundamentally rewires what we believe
- Changes how we feel about and treat a group of people
- *Creating* the wave

Narrative Frames

Narrative change frames largely fall into two categories: deficit frames and transformational frames. Deficit frames highlight racial disparities and gaps across domains that impact life outcomes such as education and health. These narratives may discuss why an individual or group of people is falling short, but answers focus on shortcomings and often characterize obstacles as insurmountable. Transformational frames are inherently more positive. For boys and men of color, a transformational frame fundamentally assumes their human value and potential, while a deficit frame requires that they prove their humanity and assumes that their potential is limited.

Research has identified a number of possible narrative frameworks shown to have transformational impact on how audiences perceive boys and men of color. The frames fall into two categories: asset frames and aspirational frames. Each of these frameworks has the potential to cause social change, but there is a caveat. They can also result in unintended consequences, limiting their impact.

Asset Frames

The idea behind asset framing approach is to lead narratives by highlighting the assets of boys and men of color while acknowledging that some challenges do exist. This approach has been found to be particularly successful in education as a method to improve academic outcomes among students and improve perspective-taking among teachers. These results have been a great source of inspiration for narrative change experts and innovative thinkers in the boys and men of color movement.

Trabian Shorters, founder and CEO of BMe Community, has been a leader at the forefront of this movement, capitalizing on the power of asset framing. BMe Community focuses exclusively on the value and success of Black men, not on their plight. BMe Community members lead by example, as a way to strengthen and uplift others in the Black community.

Thus far, the dominant narrative about boys and men of color has utilized a deficit frame. The stories we hear are consistently about their inadequacies, underachievement, and plight. We might expect this approach from those who do not wish to support strengthening communities of color, but the troubling fact is that those with intentions to uplift these communities often use a deficit approach in their work.

Those who intend to support boys and men of color are likely to not think that they are using a “deficit approach,” but instead see themselves as identifying the disparities in outcomes that they assume will trigger moral urgency to change the conditions that contribute to those disparities. For example, advocates for boys and men of color often lead with disparities—such as the education “achievement gap” or the over-incarceration of Black men—as a way to call attention to a problem and galvanize others to take action. Emphasizing negative outcomes,

however, often has the unintended consequence of reinforcing the dominant narrative by inadvertently characterizing boys and men of color as problematic or failing to achieve their potential. It also does not broaden the circle of care and concern for boys and men of color.

On the other hand, asset framing, which emphasizes the value of boys and men of color and highlights their successes, contributions, and potential, can directly counter the dominant narrative while simultaneously advancing alternate visions of boys and men of color, thereby expanding the narratives we discuss.

Let’s apply this technique. If we hope to increase hiring rates of Black male job applicants, for instance, what kind of message should we employ? The asset-based approach suggests we should highlight stories of successful Black men in the workplace, including the steps they took to achieve their success and how we can replicate it among others, rather than focusing the message on under-employment statistics for Black men in the specific industry or in general.

Asset framing is not just important for making a case to others—it also shapes the way boys and men of color see themselves. We are well aware that the dominant narrative can be internalized, creating a perception within communities of color that they do not possess the capacity to succeed, or perhaps that they do not possess the leaders who can help them succeed. So if we shift the dominant narrative, lifting up the stories of community members who have made a positive impact and promoting self-determination within communities, we can also shift internalized perceptions of potential.

“

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”



Aspirational Frames

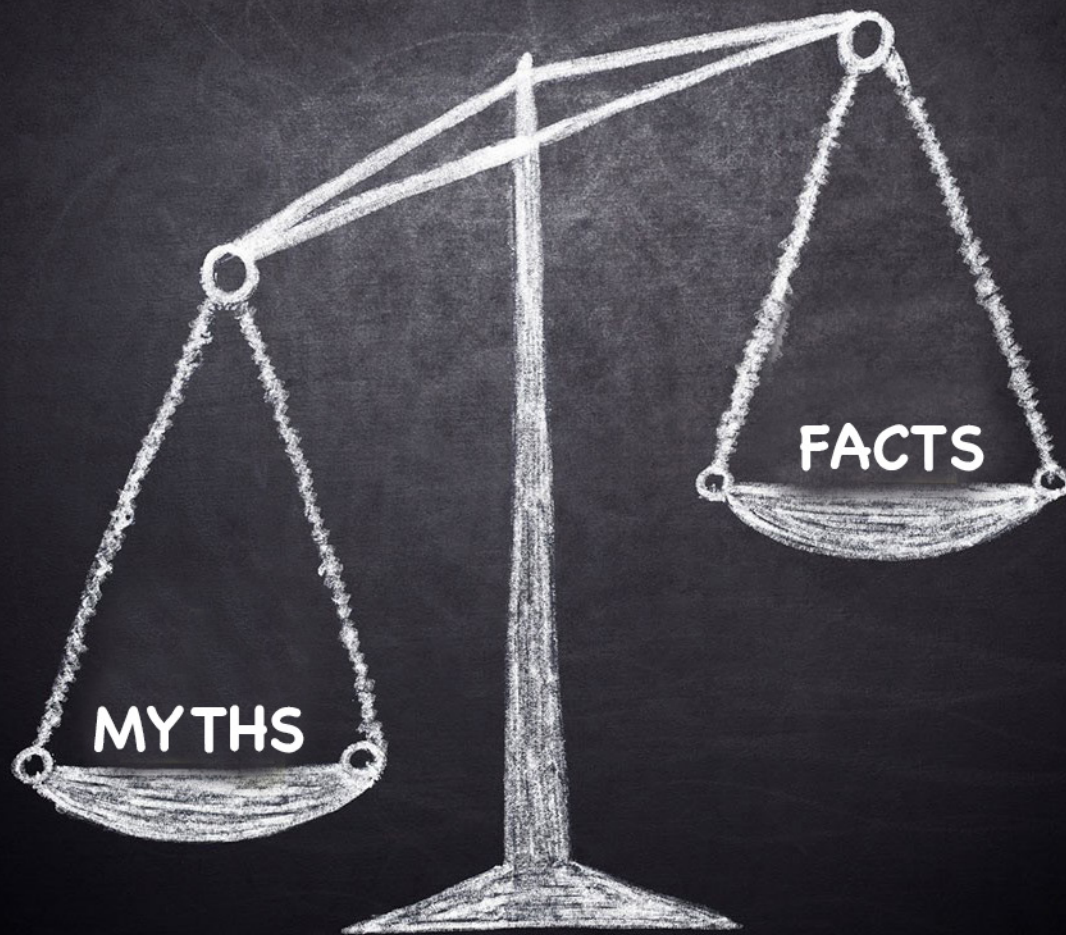
Aspirational frames motivate their audiences to take action and build empathy. There are roughly three different subtypes of aspirational frames that inspire audiences: positive likeable frames, hopeful/efficacy-based frames, and mutually positive frames.

Positive likeable frames are the most oft-used approach to countering disparity frames and transforming narratives around boys and men of color. This approach brings narratives into the mainstream fold, encouraging likeability by promoting positive stories. One such example is *Halal in the Family*, a web-based mini-series portraying the experiences of a fictional Muslim family that uses comedy to challenge stereotypes. A study examining the impact of this show on attitudes found that participants who viewed the show demonstrated significantly reduced anti-Muslim bias and increased their positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans.¹⁷

Positive portrayals generate the results we aim to see; however, caution must be taken to avoid exceptionalizing a particular story. Exceptionalizing can unintentionally lead audiences to perceive an individual or set of individuals as atypical rather than representative of the group. Positive portrayal frameworks run the risk of falling into the trap of assimilating the group into the status quo instead of challenging the confines of who and what is considered “normal” by society.¹⁸

Alternatively, hope/efficacy-based frames have proven valuable because they underscore the audience's role in societal change with respect to problems facing boys and men of color. Framing hope and efficacy in a way that is tangible allows the audience to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the greatness of the problems facing boys and men of color, and instead focus on their self-efficacy and ability to be a part of the solution.

Mutually positive frames are similarly useful in their ability to inspire audiences to be more solutions-focused. This framework seeks to center both people of color and the group in power in a positive light within narratives. These narratives are usually well-received by dominant audiences because they are easily digestible and consequently encourage audiences to take on more solutions-oriented stances to issues facing communities of color. However, these frames can result in the construction of disingenuous narratives. For this reason, mutually positive frames are extremely limiting. The greatest pitfall of such narratives is that they may promote false equivalencies in power between dominant and marginalized groups, reifying colorblind tropes or erasing the dominant group's role in historical violence.¹⁹



Debunking Myths and (Mis)Use of Data

While talking about boys and men of color as assets will be fundamental to our narrative change work, simply using an asset frame won't be enough. To effectively shift the narrative, we must directly combat misconceptions. This process is not as simple as it may seem—researchers and strategic communications experts have identified key strategies that we must use if we want to be effective. One important tactic is debunking myths.

We all know that it is very difficult to correct misinformation. Research from the mind sciences helps us understand why. When we try to debunk a myth by eliminating misinformation, we are essentially creating a mental hole. It is very difficult for our brains to have such a vacuum: in the absence of a better explanation, they opt for an inadequate explanation. So, to be effective, we have to provide an alternative to incorrect information.

However, simply providing more information is not necessarily better. There is a notion that if we just give someone the right data, that will shift their opinion. But this isn't the solution. Existing schemas are strong, and confirmation bias leads us to reject or pay less attention to information that doesn't fit into our existing schemas. We must be more strategic than just flooding people with new facts and data.

The biggest challenge is that attempting to debunk a myth may actually backfire; the effort could just reinforce the myth because we continue to

focus on it. By taking the following steps,²⁰ though, we can simultaneously reduce the salience of misinformation and increase awareness of accurate information:

- 1. Focus on core facts rather than the myth. We don't want misinformation to become more familiar.**
- 2. Precede any mention of the myth with a clear warning to notify the audience that the following information is false.**
- 3. Provide an alternate explanation. We must fill in the gap resulting from removing the myth.**

Some people are already doing the work of actively countering myths about boys and men of color—most notably, Ivory Toldson, PhD, editor of the *Journal of Negro Education* and former executive director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Through his recurring column in *The Root*, entitled “Show Me the Numbers,” Toldson has de-bunked false statements that many Americans (including Black Americans) tend to believe, such as the oft-repeated notions that there are more Black men in jail than in college, one in three Black men will go to prison, and Black men are underrepresented in higher education. Toldson's writing is effective because it examines the basis for the myths, demonstrates the misuse of data that supports them, discusses the power of voices that perpetuate them, and lays out the real facts.

There is no doubt that data on racial disparities is valuable for helping us understand the scope and depth of harms caused by racial bias. But we must be thoughtful about how we frame this data. For instance, there has recently been a lot of attention on racial disparities in the criminal justice system. In discussions of this issue, one statistic often cited comes from *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by respected legal scholar Michelle Alexander:

"Today there are more African-Americans under correctional control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began... In major American cities today, more than half of working-age African-American men are either under correctional control or branded felons and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives."

While the facts in this passage are undoubtedly true, the absolute numbers fail to tell the whole story. Nine out of 10 Black people in the U.S. were enslaved in 1850, while one in 11 Black people are under correctional control today.²¹ Moreover, research shows that emphasizing the overrepresentation of Black men in prison actually increases concern about crime and leads to greater support for punitive policies—the same policies that contribute to these disparities.²²

When presenting data as part of narrative change work, we must ask ourselves what we are trying to communicate through these facts. Are we trying to lift up important facts to a sympathetic audience, as was perhaps the case in the passage above? Or are we trying to convince opponents or "persuadables" about a particular cause or policy initiative? Are we framing the data in a way that challenges dominant narratives, or are we reinforcing negative stereotypes by showing disparities without full context?

Audience-Specific Narrative Strategies

Asset framing and debunking myths have been shown to be effective, but we know from the phenomenon of confirmation bias that when people are fixed in their views, they quickly disregard counter-arguments, causing their existing views to be strengthened. So when debunking myths, we must also be strategic about the audience of our messages. By focusing on the undecided majority rather than the unswayable minority, we can be more effective in our attempts to shift opinion.

Each person's mind has been conditioned by particular life experiences and the narrative content to which they have been exposed. But people with common experiences and people who came of age in similar communities are more likely to have similar perspectives. Such a group may be considered an "audience."

It is common in political campaigns to target messages and advertisements to segmented markets, which is the equivalent of an "audience." These markets are often constructed based on various demographic categorizations such as age, gender, race, and religion. For instance, men who are 18-35 years old, live in the suburbs, and identify as Evangelical Christians could be considered an "audience." In order to

successfully engage someone and avoid triggering a rejection of the information or a defensive response, we must frame our messages according to what we know about our audience.

For example, we know that the strategy will need to be different for different white audiences. We know that white racial anxiety can be exploited by inflammatory rhetoric and turned into fear—this fear in turn can lead to harmful perceptions and behaviors. So for some white audiences, we first have to acknowledge and disarm racial anxiety. Then we can transform this anxiety into something aspirational and empower the audience to challenge the dominant narrative. For other white audiences, racial anxiety is less of a barrier, so we can focus on perspective-taking in order to build empathy and commitment to action.

Individuals vs. Systems

We are accustomed to hearing heart-wrenching stories about harms done to individual boys and men of color. But when we extrapolate to the systemic level, these stories get lost in big statistics. How can we take narratives from the individual to the systemic level without losing the humanity of each story?

Our dominant culture has upheld the idea of personal responsibility for so long that it is often difficult for us to see when the system is at fault. The automatic reaction for many is to find and point out the failings of individuals rather than structural flaws. This approach results in people searching for the negative characteristics of victims in order to justify harms done to them—the Black man killed by police had a history of drug arrests; the Latino boy killed by police was involved with gangs in his neighborhood and didn't respond to police orders fast enough. These commonly-stated justifications operate at the individual level and are designed to absolve racially biased systems of any responsibility. The problem is compounded when a "no excuses" mantra is used with respect to boys and men of color, often in an effort to light a fire of urgency for them to control their own destinies and "make good choices." The result of these approaches is that boys and men of color are often viewed as both the cause of their own struggles and the people responsible for remedying the situation.

We have to make sure that each story about harm done to individual boys and men of color extends responsibility to the system as well. And we must be able to tell the story of an organization or a system with the characteristics of a person. This will help people understand that institutions, made up of individuals, are by definition fallible.



TRABIAN SHORTERS

Founder/CEO, BMe Community

**How do you define narrative change for boys and men of color?**

So-called narrative change is just about telling the truth about Black men and boys. Their positive truths. Just being honest about facts like Black men lead the nation in measures of patriotism, entrepreneurship, and parental involvement as reported by the U.S. Army, Department of Commerce, and Center for Disease Control. Or that volunteering and mentoring is so culturally ingrained in the Black community that we don't call it that. We call it being a teacher, a coach, an uncle, or a friend of the family.

How do you use your writing and blogging to challenge narratives? What is your approach/method?

I write op-eds on this subject that get published in *Philanthropic Chronicles*, *NBC*, *The Root*, *HuffPo*, and our own blog. In joint op-eds with the head of the Council on Foundations or the head of *Encore.org*, I connect the themes of asset-framing Black men with the themes of doing the same with age, pluralism, and other vital concerns. BMe also creates live experiences for leaders in Washington, D.C. to hear Black people speaking of the extraordinary things they accomplish and think via a TED Talk-style format. We call it BMe UNLIMITED, and it has featured leaders of the philanthropic movement such as Shawn Dove and La June Tabron.

What do you want funders interested in investing in narrative change work to know?

If you are unwilling to define people by their aspirations and contributions then you can never update your narrative of them. BMe trains executive leaders in how to do this because even those who fund asset-based community development rarely bother to change their own perceptions, as evidenced by their attention to gap data when we ask them for asset data. These aren't the same at all.

What is the positive/affirmative vision of narrative change you are trying to advance?

BMe Community's credo is to value all members of the human family, recognize Black men as assets, reject narratives that denigrate anyone, and work together for a caring and prosperous future. Our fellowship, asset-framing work, and membership network all exist to manifest this.

Do you have specific examples of what has worked/not in advancing your narrative vision?

People learn by observation and participation. Our BMe Community Genius Fellowship for Black men works. By giving communities living, inspiring examples of our asset-framing principles and allowing partners to collaborate with them on mutual interests, perceptions improve and community is formed. The fellowship has grown by demand to seven cities in the four years since we launched. Training works. We are the #1 provider of our form of asset-framing trainings, and we have earned a 4.7/5 cumulative rating by clients. They have in-turn applied what they've learned to how they fund initiatives, engage investors, and organize strategic plans.

How does your own personal narrative feed into your vision for narrative change and your work?

I am proud of and excited to be Black—not for sentimental reasons, but because I've studied our history, axiology, and epistemology. I understand who we are in a way that explains our predilection to refer to people as “brother and sister” (something that is not at all normal for Westerners to do even though we are non-white Westerners) and explains our comfort with and even preference for diunital thinking. Our role in American identity is profound, since we were brought to the land of freedom as property, and every discussion of liberty, plurality or any of America's most noble ambitions can be more deeply understood when you apply the “Black test” to them: How did we treat Black people in regards to X and why did we do so?

My love of Black people is genuine rather than defensive, defiant, or designed to make us more acceptable to someone else. We play a critical role in America's evolution. So I can promote a narrative of love and power that is Black and inclusive of all people without needing to emulsify, disguise, or dilute the Blackness in it.



BEN DUPRIS

Filmmaker, Producer, and Poet

How do you define narrative change for Native boys and men?

It's hard to talk about change without acknowledging that Native people are a culture very much rooted in things not changing. For us, it might not be about changing the narrative, but simply fighting to have a narrative out there. So the challenge is visibility, and that might just be considered a true target. Once we can build a foundation, then we can begin to transition into the discussion of what needs to change.

How do you define and identify the challenges around changing narratives, particularly around Native boys/men?

Our connection to the land, both historically and legally, provides us with a very distinct set of challenges. Sovereign Indian nations with federally recognized land put the issue of environmental justice and protection at the forefront of our concerns. There is a constant dance between state, federal, and tribal interests that we grow up dealing with, even on a minuscule level. I think Native boys and men are still in a long, slow adaptation process. We understand the need for carrying on our traditional ways but are also required to bend the rules in order to stay nimble and adapt to the challenges of today.

How do you use your film and poetry to challenge narratives?

What is your approach/method?

The paradox of being Native American lives somewhere between traditionalism and modernity. The historical myth is that we are one dimensional, either a religious caveman or a NASA scientist who never grew up with culture. The truth is absolutely in the gray area, where the "skateboarding-coyote-with-a-deerskin-iPad" lives. When you can break stereotypes that have saturated decades of modern history through work that challenges preconceptions, it becomes a win for everyone.

What do you want funders interested in investing in narrative change work to know?

Producing meaningful and timely narrative change work often requires artists and filmmakers to rely on personal finances to capture footage in the moment. It's important for funders to understand that even the smallest contribution delivered, when needed, can be more helpful than waiting for a larger contribution six months later. It can literally be the difference between being able to do the work or sitting at home while history is unfolding.

What is the positive/affirmative vision of narrative change you are trying to advance?

Indigenous people have a very strong vision, collectively, to carry our stories forward into the twenty-first century. We have survived generations of inequality, racism, and genocide. History is fast, and constantly fires a barrage of fragmented information into the public consciousness. Therefore, it is imperative to be proactive about the limited opportunities we have on a global stage and continue to share the positivity of our hearts through film, television, and the internet.

Do you have specific examples of what has worked/not in advancing your narrative vision?

Despite the wonderful programs and funding opportunities out there, initiating contact with funders can seem a bit overwhelming to a novice artist or filmmaker. I know that it took me years to gain enough confidence to feel worthy enough to ask for help. Sometimes I still doubt myself, and that is the nature of many artists. It would be exciting to see initiatives targeting newcomers into creative funding circles in the same way that banks build tiered systems for account holders. Maybe someone isn't ready to take out a house loan, but if they just had enough to buy a laptop they could revolutionize a new perspective on a smaller scale. Many Indigenous artists grew up without the practical skills to apply for funding, and they are often the most exciting artists who should be funded.

How does your own personal narrative feed into your vision for narrative change and your work?

I grew up on the reservation where I was surrounded by love, but there were very few opportunities for us as children to prepare for the outside world. We saw the world around us as disconnected and not reflective of our daily lives. My personal mission is to bring a voice of understanding to that abyss for all those young Indian boys who are standing where I once stood. It's like a metaphorical bus stop with a whole generation of Indian boys still waiting for their magic ride. They need strong voices to follow towards their hopes and dreams. That is our responsibility as Indian men.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I've referenced Native American artists and filmmakers specifically, but I would like to make it clear that Native people are some of the most mixed raced people of color in America. I have cousins who are half everything, from dark to light. So we are very aware of the importance of tolerance and community building. These are very turbulent times for people of color. Native Americans want to build allies in this movement of change while sharing our culture and unique historical perspective with the world. Unity is the best way for us all to achieve our goals.



HOW TO ADVANCE NARRATIVE CHANGE

Constructing narratives to change how we perceive boys and men of color requires us to consider the best of what we know about how our brains process narratives, how target audiences consume narratives, and how we engage stakeholders who can influence the creation and dissemination of narratives. Most importantly, the work needs ongoing monitoring and evaluation of narratives and communication strategies in order to validate our theories and ensure the kind of narrative shift that will result in measurable improvements in the lived experiences of boys and men of color. The positive change we see in the lives of boys and men of color will echo as a positive change for all of society. These key activities will drive us toward the new and expanded narratives that include training in the mind sciences, cultural strategy, and communications strategy. Philanthropy can either support or actively engage in these activities through a combination of funding organizations doing work in each of these component areas, supporting key and emerging leaders, mobilizing their networks, and exercising vocal leadership. No single foundation or approach can change dominant narratives alone. But the more intentionally that funders' strategies are targeted to address and build specific components of narrative change infrastructure, and the more that those strategies complement and reinforce each other, the more likely we are to see a positive impact.

Components of the Narrative Change Ecosystem

We have a lot of work to do in order to change the false and damaging narratives about boys and men of color. As a general matter, we need a system for communicating around a cohesive narrative at every level (local, regional, national), among all voices (grantees, funders, partners), and using all relevant knowledge and the various tools at our disposal. The components of this "narrative ecosystem" will have a mutually-reinforcing effect and, over time, will help change the way in which the general public views boys and men of color. With the components of the ecosystem in place, we can push back against what we don't like and expand what the public is consuming daily.

Creating this narrative ecosystem will require stakeholders in multiple sectors to be proactive. We need to be equipped with the tools and capacity to nimbly assess and deconstruct current narratives, effectively respond to problematic messages as they arise, and propagate new narratives rooted in research and communities. During their work together, members of the Executives' Alliance Narrative Change Table discussed several building blocks as strategic leverage points for this narrative shift. Each of the nine areas set forth below and represented in the graphic to the left presents opportunities for philanthropic investments and leadership.

“We have a lot of work to do in order to change the false and damaging narratives about boys and men of color. [It] will require stakeholders in multiple sectors to be proactive.”

1. Research

Research is essential to narrative change strategy—it provides evidence to be employed on the ground, reveals how bias interacts with narratives, shapes national discourse, and helps us understand target audiences.

Fact Checking: Research about the lived experience of boys and men of color generates new knowledge, legitimizes our understanding of circumstances, informs messaging, and provides armor to push back against false information. For example, research has shown that the media is over-reporting crime in New York City,²³ that Black youth are more likely to vote than any other racial group aged 18-29,²⁴ and that over 5,000 children are currently in foster care because of undocumented immigrant deportation procedures.²⁵ These facts, illuminated through research, influence the work of racial justice activists and organizers by empowering them to expand narratives and advance targeted messaging in their grassroots efforts on the ground.

Mind Sciences: Research in the mind sciences illuminates the phenomena of implicit bias, racial anxiety, and stereotype threat and their roles in shaping everyday interactions, communications, and institutional practices. Implicit biases are particularly powerful in determining how we perceive information. Understanding how these biases operate can help to prime how we share stories and information about boys and men of color and can guide our approach to more effective conversations about these issues with others. Experimental social psychology also offers a way to test how messages are received that does not rely upon self-reports but instead helps us understand people's unconscious reactions to particular frames, messages, and narratives.

Public Opinion: Research is also employed by the media, particularly through opinion polling. These polls help set the tone for national discourse. To effectively shape the dialogue, we must have a meaningful polling presence.

Audience Targeting and Market Segmentation: In today's innovative environment, media influencers use research to understand their audience and meaningfully connect with them. Massive amounts of data are available—we can characterize our supporters and their engagement with media content, as well as chart our impact over time. With limited resources, it is difficult to out-saturate communities with narratives. Instead, we need to optimize our resources, relying on what people care about, how they react to content, and how they relate to media.

2. Rapid Response

Rapid response strategies are messaging strategies designed for quick distribution across media platforms during any given news cycle or racial moment. Effective rapid response requires deploying creative, collaborative rapid response teams to employ a consistent, targeted message via diverse media (op-eds, hashtags, public conversations, media interviews, etc.) in a timely manner. Our priorities in these moments include the following:

Developing and Coordinating Authentic Voices: People and experts belonging directly to the impacted community or community of concern are most credible and should be the most frequently solicited voices to comment on key policy issues facing boys and men of color.

Message Testing: Ensuring that messages used in moments of crisis are grounded in empirically tested best practices in communications and relevant to target audiences.

Proactive Planning: While flashpoint moments at the intersection of race and gender cannot be predicted in and of themselves, the types of scenarios requiring rapid response have become so tragically familiar that they can be forecast. Sadly, we know that another police officer will kill an unarmed person of color, roiling yet another community.

The Pop Culture Collaborative, a grantmaking and partnership-building organization, has recognized the importance of rapid response efforts to address time-sensitive issues that narrative change work is unable to do because it takes years to make a measurable impact. As such, the Pop Culture Collaborative announced new grants specifically for those who are working to provide rapid response solutions that incorporate the powerful force of pop culture to change narratives centered specifically on people of color, immigrants, refugees, and/or Muslims.

3. Media Monitoring and Institutional Influence

Media monitoring is the process of scanning editorial and cultural content on a continuing basis to track narratives of boys and men of color to identify inaccuracies and ground accountability practices. Leveraging institutional influence is a proactive strategy to engage popular culture content makers, media institutions and educational, governmental, and social institutions in conversations about how they perpetuate biased narratives about boys and men of color and how to pursue solutions. Practices in this area may involve incentive structures, report cards, anti-bias training, and public “naming and shaming” tactics to demand accountability.

Media monitoring and influence is also enhanced with media landscape analysis, clear target audiences and audience goals, consumption habits, and advancements in emerging technology.

Color of Change has exemplified the work of media monitoring through its media justice work, which seeks to hold media accountable for creating fair and humanizing portrayals of Black people. One of its most successful efforts was its #DropOReilly campaign which removed Bill O'Reilly from Fox News after it emerged that he had been involved in multiple sexual harassment allegations and settlements. Color of Change used the opportunity to mobilize organizations, engage social media, and most importantly, target the media company's stream of revenue: advertisers. Tapping into a network of connections and relationships, Color of Change asked advertisers such as Mercedes-Benz to withdraw marketing during “The O'Reilly Show,” placing pressure on Fox News until they finally let him go.

4. Engaging Influencers and Celebrities

In many cases, the messengers are as important as the substance of the narratives. There is a long tradition of celebrity athletes and entertainers who lend their name, prestige, and visibility to an issue or cause. This approach remains as viable today as ever. Partnering with key individuals of status, especially those equipped with tools such as language and presence—and, critically, standing—has substantial potential to impact cultural narratives, both within and outside communities of color.

One such example is the work John Legend does through his organization Free America to bring attention to the issues around mass incarceration. As part of his campaign, Legend has been touring prisons across the country and meeting with prosecutors, legislators, and experts to elevate the national conversation around criminal justice reform. Due to Legend's involvement in this work, mainstream media outlets that normally would not feature stories around criminal justice system (such as People and Glamour magazine) have been covering Legend's campaign, bringing this issue to the attention of broader and younger audiences.

Of note, professional sports and hip-hop are two arenas of American public life where stereotypes about boys and men of color abound. A serious narrative change strategy will strongly benefit from targeted partnerships with celebrity athletes and entertainers who are committed to challenging these stereotypes and invested in empowering communities. Debunking the notion of success for boys of color, particularly Black boys, as tied to athletics or entertainment is critical to expanding the vision of opportunity.

5. Cultural Strategy

Cultural strategy, including pop culture strategy, integrates arts and culture into a comprehensive plan designed to shift public sentiment and forge a new collective consensus around a social problem or issue. By leveraging partnerships among socially conscious artists, advocacy groups, organizers, and funders, cultural organizing—and creative activism—bolsters and complements near-term communications work. Cultural strategy connects with audiences everywhere because culture is where people live and how they really spend their time; the reach of arts, culture, and entertainment is well beyond that of news media and traditional advocacy. And beyond adding energy and imagination to traditional communications efforts, the deeper power of cultural strategy is its ability to transform and influence dominant narratives over the longer term.

6. Content Generation

The content of messaging is crucial to its ability to actually shift the needle. Content is guided by:

Authentic and nuanced storytelling: The content of stories should be informed by and delivered through a lens of lived experience, embracing complexities and providing an array of representations. Storytelling should vary and adapt to reach different audiences, and should exist at both the national and community levels. In light of the knee-jerk polarization that dominates the way stories get told in our national racial and political environment, we must find ways to build bridges of empathy and to be provocative without doing so through a partisan lens.

Satire, comedy, and subversion: Satire, subversion, and comedy are all essential tools for intervening in dominant narratives, as they can be provocative and persuasive without being polarizing. They can translate into behavior change on the ground, including self-regulating and challenging peers.

Uplifting voices: We should be sure that boys and men of color are guiding our work, and that our messaging is in sync with the people who are most affected by the dominant narrative we seek to disrupt. We must create spaces and vehicles for young men and boys of color to create their own stories using film, video, music, radio, performing arts, publishing, journalism, and more—their vision of themselves must live behind and in front of the camera. Further, we must engage local and regional networks of activists, artists, and organizers as a way to ensure that narratives are informed by daily lived realities and the most pressing issues in communities. Starting in communities will advance narrative shift from the ground up. We should foster storytelling at the local level by creating and supporting local spaces for sharing stories and healing conversations.

A great example of an organization working on this front is the National Youth Alliance for Boys and Men of Color. This is an alliance of five youth organizing networks that aim to advance the leadership of young men of color by creating opportunities for young leaders to meet with policymakers and funders.

Funded exclusively by members of the Executives' Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, the National Youth Alliance also serves as an important strategy partner for funders and has a youth philanthropy arm, re-granting funds to youth-led campaigns nationwide.

7. Dissemination

How we deliver new narratives into the public space is critically important. We must think strategically about the varying platforms we have to disseminate content. For many of us, our most powerful tool is social media. Leveraging social media on a local, regional, and national level is a powerful mechanism to tell stories and reframe narratives at varying scales. Social media can be used to build a massive membership base, connect organizations and people from across the country, and engage people who would like to get more involved.

In addition, social media has created a new class of online celebrities—their significant online presence can be utilized to reach a larger audience around a specific issue. We must also think strategically about how certain communities engage with social media (e.g., “Black Twitter”), and how this can be leveraged to increase connectivity and saturation of the message. Particularly with youth, we must think of all of the ways they “live online” and think creatively about engaging with them across those channels (e.g., iHeartRadio, Snapchat).

8. Engagement with Local Networks & Field

In generating a narrative field within a foundation or a collective of foundations, engagement with grantees is critical. We must work with grantees to make sure they’re in a position to identify opportunities for content creation and storytelling as well as be prepared to partner with regional and national constituents to elevate stories and join them to the broader narrative. Grantees know their communities best—challenges, opportunities, and what voices and approaches will be most authentic. The input of grantee organizations should be considered at every stage of the process. Rather than being prescriptive with grantees, foundations must create a two-way dialogue that allows place-based experience to help us evolve our cultural and communications strategies.

9. Evaluation

Evaluation is essential—how else will we know what’s working? Evaluation of existing and new narrative content can help us know what stories are particularly resonating, and why. We can also understand what it is about stories and images that stick with people, drawing upon this knowledge to develop the most effective messages. We should seek input from varying stakeholders and continue to ask critical questions as we move forward in our work.

Currently, there is a substantial lack of understanding and use of evaluation in this space, so we must be especially proactive in developing metrics that help us understand impact. Sometimes we overcomplicate our expectations of what needs to be evaluated and then skip it out of paralysis. But it can be as simple as identifying a few things that you think might work (hypotheses), testing to see what happens, and noting what you learned so that you know what to keep doing and what to stop doing because it didn’t offer a return.



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Funders have to understand that
these communities are **resilient**.
Often times people get framed as **victims**, but it's better
to think about how they have
survived and **thrived**.

”

SEFA AINA

Associate Dean and Director,
Draper Center for Community Partnerships

How do you use your writing and blogging to challenge narratives?

I take into account who will be reading my material so I understand what will have the most impact. It really depends on who you are trying to reach. You can give some data, but that data has to be tied to a story. A challenge, though, is that the data is sometimes so hard to come by that the story sounds far worse than the data.

What do you want funders interested in investing in narrative change work to know?

They have to come from a place of mutual growth. They have to understand that these communities are resilient. Often times people get framed as victims, but it's better to think about how they have survived and thrived.

What is the positive/affirmative vision of narrative change you are trying to advance?

A lot of it is tied to the audience that I am trying to talk to. As a Samoan, it's about our strong history in the Pacific and how we used our skills to navigate the ocean before anyone could. We are problem-solvers; we know how to preserve life and land and flourish.

Do you have specific examples of what has worked/not in advancing your narrative vision?

Two friends in the Bay Area organizing with ROOTS (Remember Our True Selves) had me lead a workshop around mapping inequities (sometimes known as mapping your Hood). Because they all had a similar lived reality, the youth and organizers were able to react to the questions about bettering themselves far more quickly. It was about learning from what they saw. I've done that workshop a million times but never saw such a strong reaction. We tend to throw away these kids because their value is not immediately apparent, and we have to stop doing that.

How does your own personal narrative feed into your vision for narrative change and your work?

Growing up as a Samoan in a predominately Black neighborhood, trying to fit in was difficult. This was also the time around School House Rock and the theory of the "Melting Pot." I felt like I made it to college in spite of who I was, and not necessarily because of who I was. The thing that separated me was that I tested well. Looking back on that, I worry about that type of self-hate. It tends to cause you to accidentally lean into those stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies. Whenever I push this work with young people now, I always start with valuing yourself.





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The **biggest thing**
we have to do in **narrative change**
is move people from an **“unfortunate”** to **“unjust”**
framework.
”

RASHAD ROBINSON

Executive Director, Color of Change

I define narrative change as shifting people’s basic understanding of the world or an issue and the systems that play into it. As a result, this shifts people’s behaviors.

From my perspective, the biggest thing we have to do in narrative change is move people from an “unfortunate” to “unjust” framework. We spend a lot of time promoting messages or frameworks that keep people in an “unfortunate” perspective, like trying to build empathy or trying to build dignity. These frameworks seem noble on their face, but actually operate against driving structural change. For instance, when people have empathy for Black people facing challenges, they are like “Oh, we should start a mentoring program at their failing school,” not “We should actually change the failing school.”

This has to be about moving people from one set of bad decision makers, which are thought of as boys and men of color, to another set, which are government, corporations, and people inside those institutions making decisions that endanger boys and men of color.

We do this through strategic campaigns; we do this through the stories we choose to tell at a systems level; we do this through the interventions that we make. Through our strategic campaigns, we make it a point to show how these structures are manufactured by telling an accurate story of heroes and villains. You have to tell the public who the actors and decision-makers are, and direct them to clear ways they can actually do something about it.

For instance, Color of Change released a report on the diversity of writers’ rooms in Hollywood. Diversity is a strategic thing we should talk about. Our goal is not diversity for diversity’s sake. The basis of the report is that by shifting the diversity in the writers’ rooms we can shift

the diversity of content we see. And content has an impact. Just getting Black people more jobs in Hollywood may not be helpful in and of itself unless this impacts the content.

It is also important to identify solutions that don’t just make us feel good but are actually scalable and have broad impact. This requires identifying solutions and interrogating our assumptions about which levers we pull that will have impact. For example, simply telling our Black boys to pull up their pants and learn how to tie a tie doesn’t shift the structures that manufacture poverty and racism.

This is why power is so important versus empathy and dignity in narrative change. We need to tell systems-level stories. There’s a lot of interest to tell positive stories about Black men. We had eight years of the most positive portrayal of a Black man that you could get, and that did not change systems. That’s presence and visibility without power. Power is the ability to change the rules—sometimes that’s the written rules, sometimes that’s the unwritten rules.

Once you “fix” the problem without changing systems and structures, people want to find a way to feel like they have done something to move on to the next thing. Unless we tell stories that lead to systems change, we don’t get anything that is scalable and we don’t incentivize. This is part of what we have to do in narrative change—we have to incentivize the right type of behavior and action. Shifting people’s beliefs and understandings changes how people behave and show up in the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

We believe philanthropy can play a critical role in helping to shift the narratives about boys and men of color. Doing so will require creating internal and external infrastructure, both within the philanthropic sector and in the BMOC field.

The funders who participate in the EA's Narrative Change Collective Action Table jointly developed a Strategy Framework for Narrative Change and Expansion, which recommends a combination of serious and strategic investments in narrative change creators and innovators (especially young men of color) and alignment of grantmaking strategy and overall foundation practices with the principles of narrative change. The recommendations cover four broad categories:

1 Increase support in the development of youth leadership



OBJECTIVE

Increase support in the development of youth leadership (value-based / true engagement)

ACTIONS

Invest in youth organizers and organizations that lift up youth leadership

Develop a robust process for engaging youth in the narrative development efforts

Create and maximize opportunities to engage youth in controlling their own narratives

Invest in leadership of young people in communications and journalism

2 Increase accountability for supporting diverse voices



OBJECTIVE

Increase accountability for supporting diverse voices

ACTIONS

Engage and support diverse community voices impacted by inaccurate narratives (people of color, those with lived experiences, informally educated / life scholars etc.)

Create an annual assessment of the state of narrative change with a focus on boys and men of color (fund evaluations)

Invest in independent narrative start-ups

Invest in low-cost tools that enhance access

Commission motivational (not opinion polling) research to understand the drivers of target audiences

Invest in arts and culture projects as an embedded strategy to address diverse issues

3

Support and fortify a broad narrative ecosystem



OBJECTIVE

Support and fortify a broad narrative ecosystem

ACTIONS

Build an orchestra of narrative voices featuring a cadence of strategic time-anchored messages and video assets

Define a common message to unite philanthropic stakeholders, then collectively push it forward

Fund an issue-specific, field-wide narrative system design process for a cohort of field stakeholders

Create a rapid response work group to focus on umbrella narrative

Assess current assets and capacity to address BMOC narrative change nationally (Don't recreate--build on things already in play)

Convene by sector within narrative infrastructure to identify best practices

Create an open platform for sharing best practices

Convene grantees and narrative change experts for training, strategizing and capacity building

4

Assess and improve internal practices to promote funder integrity



OBJECTIVE

Assess and improve internal practices to promote funder integrity

ACTIONS

Create ample space for foundation CEOs to engage in deep learning to understand narrative change / expansion

Revise reporting requirements to be asset-based

Provide multi-year funding to develop a pipeline of vibrant narrative changers (career development)

Invest in collective-use infrastructure (costly to field) i.e. public opinion data, media clipping service, video production / media production studios in key cities

Undo unnecessary structural red tape

Show collective strength of philanthropic dollars to drive the national agenda



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When we stop taking the time to **learn about the**
real lives and experiences of those who are different from us,
 we accept the **images** and **storylines** we see in
 media as truth, and that version of truth becomes
 embedded into our **national culture.**

”

JOSE ANTONIO VARGAS

Founder / CEO of Define American

Stories are at the heart of how we understand one another.

Right now, in our country, we're experiencing a deep divide. Everywhere we look, it seems that people are talking (or shouting) at each other instead of taking the time to listen. We are fracturing ourselves into silos and echo chambers rather than challenging ourselves to understand people who think differently than we do. Recent studies have found that most Americans maintain social groups that share their same ethnicity, political viewpoint, and value system. According to Public Religion Research Institute, it is becoming increasingly rare for people to step outside of their homogenous communities and connect with individuals from diverse backgrounds. At a time when people are becoming more insular, media plays an even more powerful role in shaping the way that we understand the world around us. When we stop taking the time to learn about the real lives and experiences of those who are different from us, we accept the images and storylines we see in media as truth, and that version of truth becomes embedded into our national culture.

The power of media to drive social change is undeniable. By picking and choosing which narratives to elevate, media shapes our very thinking. A paper by Erin Kearns, Allison Betus and Anthony Lemieux entitled "Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?" found that between 2011 and 2015, media coverage of terrorist attacks were 449% more likely to receive coverage if the suspect was Muslim. During this same period, the actual number of such attacks committed by a Muslim person was 12.4%. Sensationalism, fear mongering, and ratings have fed a false but dangerous and dominating narrative about

Muslims being terrorists and extremists. It comes as no surprise then that a 2016 FBI report revealed hate crimes against Muslims had risen to 9/11-era levels.

At Define American, we are actively fighting this culture war in the media space. We focus primarily on seeding news and entertainment (film and television) media with uplifting and humanizing stories of immigrants, because when people see us represented in a way that connects with their empathy, they begin to realize that we are human beings. At its core, that is the problem: millions of Americans do not see immigrants as fully human, deserving of equality—as Americans. And if we're not even seen as human beings, it's too easy to blame us for all of our country's problems and to thoughtlessly pass legislation that tears our families apart. So we share our real stories and we change the conversation. We rehumanize ourselves because until we do, this will always be an uphill battle.

Immigrants, as well, are not one-dimensional or single-issue people. We are women and we are men; we are Black, Latino, Asian, White; we are gay, straight, bi, trans, queer. To be intersectional in this work means to understand that creating a more welcoming and inclusive culture for immigrants means that we have to create a more welcoming and inclusive culture for everyone. This is about all of us, and we need to stand together to get it done.



THOMAS CHATTERTON WILLIAMS

Author and Journalist

How would you define “narrative change” for boys and men of color?

Narrative change means altering the story we tell ourselves about ourselves—the framework through which we perceive ourselves—because that is ultimately what we have the power most directly to shape.

How do you define and identify the challenges around changing dominant narratives, particularly around boys/men of color?

Changing the dominant narrative around the group to which one belongs is beyond the control of most people individually. But if enough people take control of their own narratives, the collective narrative is inevitably altered. So the key remains to interrogate and take ownership of the internal story being crafted. Beyond that, I think Black writers, artists, entertainers, public figures, and educators have an obligation to offer a much wider array of Black experiences in order to complicate the dominant narrative. To this end, I think we are in the early stages of a kind of flourishing right now. A movie like *Moonlight* comes to mind.

Do you use your writing and blogging to challenge narratives? If so, what is your approach?

I am often trying to complicate lazy ideas in the wider culture of what a Black person should think like or be. In recent years, for example, a narrative around Black victimization has taken hold in the wider culture, with both Blacks and often well-meaning non-Blacks reifying the idea that Black life is somewhat cursed and at the very least conditional. I often push back against this—not because I don’t believe in the persistence of racism and other forms of inequality, but because I find it oversimplifies the truth evident in the multitude of Black experiences simultaneously unfolding in a very large nation. Class and race and region and many other factors get conflated. Moreover, I believe that narratives, when repeated enough, become self-perpetuating. Ideas of inferiority or superiority are reified through the stories we tell about ourselves.

What is the affirmative and/or more complex narrative of either boys and men of color and/or American life that you are trying to advance?

That there is great variety, brilliance, resilience, discipline, and dignity in Black life and culture—and beyond that, I want to complicate our very notions of race.

How does your own personal narrative fit into your vision for narrative change and your work?

I often write in the first-person. My first book, *Losing My Cool*, dealt with my own experience coming up in New Jersey in the 80s and 90s and defining myself through some of the most stereotypical and limiting narratives available to me through commercialized hip-hop culture. It’s the story of how wildly my Black American experience veered from my father’s (he came up in the 40s and 50s in segregated Texas and had few of my problems, though he faced graver obstacles). I wanted to show how notions of authenticity shift over generations and how things we think of as fundamental to our sense of self can be illusory. I wanted to show through the gradual awakening I had in college and later abroad how a person might create or re-create himself independently of the dominant narrative. In my second book, an expansion of my 2015 essay “Black and Blue and Blond,” I’m using my experience as a Black man of mixed-race heritage with a Black father descended from Southern slaves and a white-looking daughter born in Paris to take a deeper look at the ways we construct racial identity in the first place.

Who are other writers/content creators that you think of as “narrative change-makers”?

I love director Barry Jenkins and artist Kerry James Marshall. The novelist Colson Whitehead also comes to mind. But, can there be a greater narrative change-maker than Barack Obama?

If you were advising funders/the philanthropic community on investing in narrative change, what would you like them to know?

I’d want them to take seriously the idea that funding artists and writers really matters. Providing many more visionary people the means to speak and be heard seems to me how change happens best. So for me that means grants for books to be written and films to be shot—perhaps even magazines to be published.

APPENDICES

The following appendices provide tools and additional information to help you begin or advance your foundation's work on narrative change.

Appendix A provides a **Glossary** of terms used in this guide.

Appendix B offers **Resources** for additional background and guidance on the process of narrative change and expansion, as well as strategic communications about boys and men of color.

Appendix C is a tool for funders to conduct an **Inventory** of your foundation's existing footprint in the narrative change ecosystem.

Appendix D offers **Screening Questions for Investment** in narrative change that will ideally complement and bolster current grantmaking in strategic communications, media strategy and media arts, and cultural strategy.

Appendix E is a **Self-Audit** tool for funders to assess your foundation's internal and external communications strategies and understand how existing practices support or deter narrative change.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

Below are Perception Institute's definitions of several key terms that are fundamental to effective narrative change work.

Confirmation bias is the unconscious, differential assessment of behavior resulting from stereotypes or negative associations.

Dehumanization is the denial of "humanness" to someone in a different racial or ethnic group, often by those with higher status, power, and social connection.

Echo chamber is a situation in which information, ideas, or beliefs are amplified or reinforced by transmission and repetition inside an enclosed system where different or competing views are censored, disallowed or otherwise underrepresented.

Explicit bias is an attitude or belief we have about a person on a conscious level.

Filter bubble is the isolation of users of online services (like search engines) within their own ideological or cultural bubbles. This results from computer algorithms that anticipate what a user prefers to see based on prior choices, online behaviors, and preferences.

Identity differences are the components of the self—including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, or class—that result in people being sorted into culturally or institutionally relevant groups.

Implicit bias refers to the brain's automatic, instant association of stereotypes or attitudes toward particular groups, without our conscious awareness.

Narratives are spoken or written accounts of connected events.

Racial anxiety is the brain's stress response about experiences and potential consequences of interracial interactions.

Schema are mental frameworks that we use to organize and understand our experience of the world around us.

Stereotype threat is the brain's impaired cognitive functioning that occurs when a person is concerned that he or she will confirm a negative stereotype about his or her group.

APPENDIX B

RESOURCES

The following publications and commentary—relating to narrative change, strategic communications and cultural strategy—complement this toolkit and serve as useful resources for grantmakers interested in investing strategically in narrative change. These resources are not limited to boys and men of color, but the key insights are applicable.

Black Boys and Men: Changing the Narrative (NUY McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, 2018)

This 16-part podcast series and accompanying social media campaign bring together thought leaders from the public and private sectors to analyze stereotypes and dispel myths concerning Black boys and men while providing facts and best practices for those working with these often marginalized populations.

<http://mcsilver.nyu.edu/black-boys-and-men-changing-the-narrative>

Culture Matters: Understanding Cultural Strategy and Measuring Cultural Impact (The Culture Group, 2015)

A literature review and discussion of impact measurement for cultural strategy.

http://revolutionsperminute.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/TCG_CultureMatters_Full.pdf

Five Ideas on Strategies and Tactics for Cultural Change (Jumpslide Strategies, 2017)

A short essay about cultural strategy in the face of today's political context.

<https://medium.com/a-more-perfect-story/five-ideas-on-strategies-and-tactics-for-cultural-change-fdedd1325f7a>

Making Waves: A Guide to Cultural Strategy (The Culture Group, 2012)

This easy-to-read guidebook explains the concept of cultural strategy—how it works, and why it matters. It includes historical and contemporary examples to bring the theories and concepts to life and offer practical steps for grassroots and advocacy organizations to initiate and deploy cultural strategy.

<http://revolutionsperminute.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Making-Waves-The-Culture-Group.pdf>

On Defense: African American Males Making Sense of Racialized Narratives in Mathematics Education (Na'ilah Suad Nasir & Niral Shah, 2011)

This paper examines how African American male students understand, interpret, and think about the effects of racialized narratives in relation to mathematics learning. Drawing on interviews, the authors argue that racialized narratives exist in relation to one another and are fundamental to the way that young people build their identities, including identities as math learners.

<https://create4stem.msu.edu/sites/default/files/event/files/2011%20Nasir.pdf>

Opportunity for Black Men and Boys: Public Opinion, Media Depictions, and Media Consumption (Opportunity Agenda, 2011)

Presents a review of literature that looks at how media representations affect the lives of Black men and boys as well as analyses of public opinion research on race, implications for promoting Black male achievement, and Black men's media consumption.

<http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/blackmenboysmediaperception.pdf>

Pop Culture Works for Social Change (AndACTION, 2017)

Provides step-by-step instructions to show you how to leverage pop culture—TV and film stories in particular—as an effective communications tool for social change.

<http://andaction.org/blog/download-report-pop-culture-works-social-change/>

#PopJustice: Social Justice and the Promise of Pop Culture Strategies (Liz Manne Strategy, 2016)

A six-volume report series aimed at foundations and advocates to help them navigate and understand the pop culture industries and the enormous opportunities they offer for social change.

<http://popjustice.org>

Portrayal and Perception: Two Audits of News Media Reporting on African American Men and Boys (Heinz Endowments, 2011)

The Heinz Endowments' African American Men and Boys Task Force conducted an audit of media reporting on Black men and boys in Pittsburgh. Based on content analysis of newspapers and evening newscasts in addition to a survey and video interviews, the findings highlight a media scene that underrepresents African-Americans males, especially in terms of their positive achievements.
<http://www.heinz.org/UserFiles/Library/AAMB-MediaReport.pdf>

Racial Equity Resource Guide (W.K. Kellogg Foundation)

Practical resources—including articles, organizations, research, books, media strategies and training curricula—aimed at helping organizations and individuals working to achieve racial healing and equity in their communities.
<http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org>

Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys (Opportunity Agenda, 2011)

<http://racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Media-Impact-onLives-of-Black-Men-and-Boys-OppAgenda.pdf>

Spoiler Alert: How Progressives Will Break Through with Pop Culture (Tracy Van Slyke, 2014)

A report on the major strategic investments that progressives can make into popular culture and creative activism to achieve transformative societal and political change.
<http://spoileralert.report>

Telling Our Own Story: The Role of Narrative in Racial Healing (Perception Institute, 2013)

This report explores the role of narratives in shaping racial bias. Narratives are a powerful mechanism to challenge ongoing racial discrimination.
<https://perception.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Telling-Our-Own-Story.pdf>

The Boys Aren't Broken, The Systems Are: Changing the Narrative about Young Men of Color (essays from various authors compiled by Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2018)

This issue of the journal *Voices in Urban Education* reflects the fruits of a 2017 conference that aimed to address the need for researchers and educators to build an asset-based counter-narrative about young men of color and develop evidence-based strategies to better serve them. Attendees shared system-level strategies that challenged deficit mindsets and implicit bias, nurtured healthy and respectful relationships, and developed culturally sustaining practices.
https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/emj309/vue48/VUE48_full_issue.pdf

They (Don't) Care About Education: A Counternarrative on Black Male Students' Responses to Inequitable Schooling (Shaun R. Harper & Charles H. F. Davis III, 2012)

Focus group interviews and systematic content analysis of 304 essays written by Black male undergraduates that refute the dominant message that black men do not care about education. On the contrary, these students aspire to earn doctoral degrees in education despite acutely understanding that the education system is stacked against them. The analysis asks what compels that dedication.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ968820.pdf>

Toward New Gravity: Charting a Course for the Narrative Initiative (The Narrative Initiative, 2017)

A discussion of narrative theory, storytelling, and meta-narrative.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/588917781e5b6c5189c11818/t/594120b1cd0f685192dbb10f/1497440450094/TowardNewGravity-June2017.pdf>

Transforming Perception: Black Men and Boys (Perception Institute, 2013)

This report synthesizes dozens of studies to show how biased and distorted perceptions of Black men and boys are created, how emotions and fears about race shape behaviors and biases, and how those perceptions affect major life opportunities.
<http://perception.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Transforming-Perception.pdf>

Vision, Values, and Voice: A Communications Toolkit (The Opportunity Agenda, 2013)

The toolkit's guidance is based on the belief that the theme of opportunity can provide the basis for a narrative that unites social justice messages and constituencies across a range of social issues—e.g., human rights, criminal justice, and education—where opportunity is at risk.
<http://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org>

APPENDIX C

NARRATIVE CHANGE INFRASTRUCTURE: AN ACTIVITY INVENTORY FOR FUNDERS

This tool is designed to help you explore the specific components of the narrative change ecosystem that your foundation’s work might address. Your responses should yield an inventory of activities in each category. Some funders will find that their work touches many of these components, but likely not all. No foundation can cover every area. But understanding the realms in which your foundation and others do or do not operate can help to reinforce the importance of existing practice, inspire a shift in priorities, reveal gaps in coverage, and lift up opportunities for collaboration with other funders who are active in complementary areas of focus. Use the chart below to track your responses and compare notes with your colleagues.

1. What is your foundation’s current “footprint” (including investments and leadership) in the various components of the narrative change ecosystem? Is any of this work intended to address narratives about boys and men of color in particular?
2. How do your foundation’s activities (including investments and leadership) in the various components of the narrative change ecosystem reinforce each other (or not)?







4

Engaging
Influencers
& Celebrities

5

Cultural
Strategy

6

Content
Generation

7

Dissemination

8

Engagement
with Local
Networks & Field

9

Evaluation

APPENDIX D

SCREENING QUESTIONS FOR INVESTMENT

To help grantmakers begin to invest strategically to promote narrative change and narrative expansion, we provide some basic screening questions to consider.



The following could apply to any area of social justice and racial equity grantmaking and advocacy work:

- ❑ Does the program or project move the deeper narrative or lift up new, authentic voices?
- ❑ Does it disrupt the echo chambers or reinforce an existing echo chamber?
- ❑ What might be any unintended consequences of the narrative being advanced? Might it appear divisive or polarizing?
- ❑ How does it leverage the current mainstream media cycle or new media partners?
- ❑ How does it integrate with and support policy priorities?
- ❑ Does the grantee demonstrate an understanding of narrative creation? Are they utilizing best practices when it comes to framing?
- ❑ How will this work strengthen the overall narrative infrastructure? Will there be opportunities to convene and partner?
- ❑ Not all narratives are the same; how will this narrative approach support or interact with other narratives being advanced for boys and men of color?

Here are questions that apply to the development and production of NARRATIVE CONTENT:

- ❑ What is the narrative or set of narratives being advanced?
- ❑ Does the project include narrative and and/or strategic communications strategies?
- ❑ Does it challenge racial hierarchy, dominant narratives, and internalized oppression?
- ❑ From a storytelling standpoint, does it have an authentic voice?
- ❑ Is there an intersectional lens to the narrative (does it recognize overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage)?
- ❑ Does it promote an asset frame (as opposed to a deficit frame)?
- ❑ Is this an individual or systemic narrative? How do they relate?
- ❑ Who determines the narrative?
- ❑ What is the role of anti-Black racism in the narrative?
- ❑ How complex is the narrative? Where are the nuances? Will it engage audiences differently? Will the narrative create a buzz?
- ❑ Who is developing the content? Are they aware of their own potential implicit biases that they may bring to the creative process?

One must always have a clear audience strategy in mind:

- ❑ Who is the intended audience? What is its purpose?
- ❑ How will boys and men of color see themselves in the messaging? What concrete roles have themselves played in crafting the narratives thus far?
- ❑ If you engage with the audience and elicit their feedback, you can understand their vision for change and incorporate it into your approach to solutions. How is this work incorporating feedback from constituents to test, revise, and rethink narratives?
- ❑ Is this work geared towards boys and men of color/communities, or does it address other potential constituencies?
- ❑ Do these narratives play out in white communities and for people of color and between groups of color? Does it bring the audience into an experience, or does it tell them what to feel about it?
- ❑ Is the goal of the narrative to change dominant thinking by white communities or to bring healing to people of color?
- ❑ How will the narrative create opportunities for community or civic participation?
- ❑ Does the narrative engage the target audience in a place that is relevant and where they are already spending their time? Will the project create opportunities for further participation and engagement with the subject matter?

And here, we provide questions that apply to each specific node within the narrative change ecosystem.

1. RESEARCH

- ❑ What is the data/research undergirding the narrative that is being promoted?
- ❑ How is grantee making facts visible?

2. RAPID RESPONSE

- ❑ How is the work to 'correct the record' in rapid response interacting with broader narrative grantee wishes to advance? What are the creative strategies being employed to support the narrative?
- ❑ How prepared is this grantee to anticipate attacks and respond to existing/expected attacks on boys and men of color?
- ❑ How are thought leaders and ally organizations being coordinated to strengthen impact of the response?

3. MEDIA MONITORING AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCE

- ❑ Can the work be a new pathway to setting better standards of practice within the industries?
- ❑ What data is being collected that can provide opportunities for accountability?

4. ENGAGING INFLUENCERS AND CELEBRITIES

- ❑ What is the influencer strategy? Does the work have natural member constituents that can also serve as influencers? What types of tools and platforms will the grantee use to elevate their voices?
- ❑ What kind of support structures and learning opportunities are being provided for influencers?



5. CULTURAL STRATEGY

- ❑ Is there an opportunity for this work to develop strategic partnerships inside of the big media industries (entertainment, news, sports, etc.)?
- ❑ Does this work demonstrate a critical analysis of possible levers for change within the entertainment industry or athletic systems? Will it engage newsrooms, journalists, scripted writers, and network executives?
- ❑ How does the work engage networks for amplification?

6. CONTENT GENERATION

- ❑ Does the content invite engagement and create authentic space to be a part of the conversation?

7. CONTENT DISSEMINATION

- ❑ What is the distribution model?
- ❑ Is there a related communications strategy paired with the narrative strategy goals?
- ❑ What is the follow-up plan for community engagement?
- ❑ Will there be toolkits for organizers?
- ❑ What are the opportunities to engage outside of media?

8. ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL NETWORKS AND FIELD

- ❑ Does the grantee have shared analysis and vocabulary of the problem with the field? Is the grantee pushing a different narrative?

9. EVALUATION

- ❑ Show, don't tell. Being able to point to popular stories or examples that are shaping new narratives can play important role in moving the vision of insiders from old approaches and outdated narratives to this new narrative infrastructure.
- ❑ How are data being collected and used to enhance narrative and evaluation?
- ❑ Does the work shift implicit biases or racial anxiety within the viewing audience?
- ❑ How likely will this project be to shift behavior?
- ❑ How many people with this project reach?
- ❑ Mind Sciences: Does the approach emphasize disparity?

NOTES

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APPENDIX E

APPLYING PRINCIPALS OF NARRATIVE CHANGE: A SELF-AUDIT FOR FUNDERS

This tool can be used as a general self-audit to assess whether and how your foundation's grantmaking, communications, internal operations and business practices reflect principles of narrative change for boys and men of color. The tool can be used by any funder, but will be especially valuable to funders who already have targeted investments designed to support boys and men of color and wish to optimize their application of narrative change principles in this work. This is not a "test," but rather an important opportunity for self-reflection by individual grantmakers and teams.

1. What are the dominant narratives about boys and men of color (or a specific population of boys and men of color) in the community/communities my foundation serves? (May be used to focus on specific geographies and/or specific populations, such as Latino men and boys.)

- What are the sources of these dominant narratives about this particular community?
- Why have these dominant narratives been so effective for this particular community?

2. Do my foundation's internal and external communications reinforce deficit-based frames about boys and men of color, or do they foster asset-based frames (or shift, expand, or otherwise challenge dominant narratives)?

- How do our communications reference boys and men of color? Is there a narrative of "plight and peril" or a narrative of "potential and possibility"? (Consider the website, annual reports, press releases, and notices of funding availability.)
- Do our communications and publications feature boys and men of color in their own words?
- Do our communications and publications feature images of boys and men of color that connote positive, healthy, and successful people, communities, and relationships?

3. Do my foundation's investments and initiatives (including grantmaking, leadership, research, and evaluation) reinforce deficit-based frames about boys and men of color, or do they foster asset-based frames (or shift, expand, or otherwise challenge dominant narratives)?

- Which organizations do we fund, who leads them (staff/ board), and whom they serve?
- Do we fund organizations that (unintentionally) foster deficit-based narratives about boys and men of color? And do we urge our grantees to use asset-based frames?
- Have we developed a shared understanding or set a standard among our grantees regarding asset-based frames about boys and men of color?
- Do we invest in supporting the capacity of (young) men of color to lead, or do we mostly invest in organizations led by others to support (young) men of color?
- What portion of our grant commitments are targeted to support activities that challenge structural and systemic barriers to opportunity for boys

- Do our grant proposal and submissions guidelines (in)directly reward prospective grantees for promoting negative, deficit-based narratives about their communities?
- Do (young) men of color have a meaningful opportunity to advise or influence our grantmaking, investment, and leadership strategies as advisors or paid consultants?
- Do our evaluation requirements contribute to grantees' learning and growth, or are they mostly "extractive"?

4. Do my foundation's internal operations and business practices reflect reinforce deficit-based frames about boys and men of color, or do they foster asset-based frames (or shift, expand, or otherwise challenge dominant narratives)?

- What is my foundation's track record of recruiting, hiring, and retaining men of color?
- Has my foundation adopted and faithfully implemented fair-chance hiring principles?
- Who manages my foundation's endowment/assets?
- Are my foundation's assets invested in industries that harm boys and men of color and their communities (e.g., tobacco, firearms, and private prisons)?

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