

FUTURE NARRATIVE 3:

Immigrant Opportunity

Fear Narrative

The anti-immigrant narratives that have a stronghold in this country often center on the harmful idea that members of our community who were not born in the United States are fundamentally different from those who were. It also assumes that citizenship and status are prizes that can be easily granted but also taken away. Most dangerously, many of these narratives are rooted in racist worldviews that center whiteness and maintaining traditional power structures.

Fear Narrative Values

Law and Order

Laws matter and are solely created to protect our communities. A world in which these laws aren't perfectly upheld represents a grave threat to our collective safety.

Fairness

The world ought to be fair, whether it's our economy, education system, or immigration policies.

“Security means freedom from fear and freedom to dream.

“We need to build and protect policies that allow people to flourish in this country.

Future Narrative

People across the world share a strong desire for freedom, the ability to provide for their families and communities, and the right to live safely. This is why so many people of all backgrounds make courageous sacrifices to start new lives in the United States. People working hard for a dignified life deserve a roadmap to live, thrive, and help build the world we want to live in. We need to build and protect policies that allow people to flourish in this country, including a just and humane immigration system.

Future Narrative Values

Solidarity

We believe in the humane and just treatment of all people in our country, which is why we stand up for our immigrant neighbors, regardless of where they come from or what they look like. We are in this struggle together.

Belonging

Belonging means having a meaningful voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of the political, social, and cultural structures that shape one's life.¹

Security

Everyone deserves to have their basic needs met and the opportunity to get ahead in life—from food on the table to a quality education and job that pays a living wage. Security means freedom from fear and freedom to dream.

It's important to remember that everyone has a set of values—even the people we disagree with. While we may sometimes claim the same values as our opposition, the way we define those values can differ significantly.

¹ Definition from The Othering and Belonging Institute. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu>.

FEAR NARRATIVE

Underlying Beliefs

Narratives are shaped and upheld by our underlying beliefs. These are beliefs that are both conscious and subconscious and shape how we understand the world around us.

- It is easy to immigrate to the United States legally and there are a variety of legal pathways for those who seek them.
- Immigrants intentionally exploit U.S. systems to come to this country.
- Immigrants take away from, rather than contribute to, the United States and its prosperity. These narratives often go further, portraying immigrants as altering the cultural and demographic makeup of the country in ways that are framed as threatening or harmful.

Mainstream Manifestations

Mainstream Manifestations are real-world examples that either display how the narratives we want to promote are already taking hold within our movements, or how common underlying beliefs can reinforce extreme ideas and conspiracy theories that harm our communities.

Great Replacement Theory

This conspiracy theory claims that pro-immigrant policies are part of an effort to reduce the political and cultural power of white people in the United States.

Criminality

Immigrants are portrayed as dangerous people from dangerous places who make the United States less safe.

Invasion/Flooding

Metaphors like “flooding” or “invasion” are used to stir fear and suggest that immigrants, particularly non-white immigrants, are overwhelming the country.

These mainstream manifestations are inherently rooted in racism, which is why they are so harmful and pernicious.

FUTURE NARRATIVE

Underlying Beliefs

- Our communities are strongest when we welcome people to the United States so they can flourish in this country.
- Movement, whether it be between cities, states, or countries, is a natural part of our modern world.
- Detaining, abducting and removing immigrants from the United States is cruel and inhumane.

Mainstream Manifestations

Protests Against ICE

Rallies for the release of community members abducted by ICE have occurred nationwide.

Student Protests

Mass mobilizations have been organized for students who have been abducted or detained for practicing their right to free speech.

Communities, Not Cages

Campaigns have launched to rapidly reshape how and why we use detention in this country.



Photo Credit: Bill Hatcher



Photo Credit: Molly Adams via Flickr



FUTURE NARRATIVE 3: IMMIGRANT OPPORTUNITY

VPSA BREAKDOWN

Value Statement:



People across the world share a strong desire for freedom, the ability to contribute and provide for their families and communities, and the right to live safely. This is why so many people of all backgrounds make courageous sacrifices to start new lives in the United States.

Name the Problem:



Instead of addressing the barriers people across our country face to achieving a better life, our politicians and mainstream culture have found a scapegoat in immigrants. Immigration enforcement agencies like ICE routinely intimidate, abduct, and detain immigrants, often without due process, threatening the safety and security of our communities. In addition to being inhumane, ICE's efforts cost working Americans billions of dollars, while elite politicians and private firms reap an immoral profit.

Guidance Toward Solution:



Our communities are strongest when we center policies, such as expanding sanctuary for people who immigrated here, and a culture rooted in advancing the shared goals of all people working for a better life.

Collective Action:



People working hard for a dignified life deserve a roadmap to live, thrive, and help build the world we want to live in. We need to build and protect policies that allow people to flourish in this country, including a just and humane immigration system.



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This project is a celebration of the mosaic of people, cultures, talents, stories and countries of origin that make New York and New Yorkers so special... I hope people value the importance of diversity and how different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures enrich us as a society and make us stronger.

– OSCAR CASTILLO, RESPONDING TO THE NEW YORK PROUD CAMPAIGN

NARRATIVE INTERVENTION CASE STUDY New York Proud

What They Did:

In 2024, The Opportunity Agenda collaborated with New York Immigration Coalition, F.Y.Eye, and award-winning photographer Oscar Castillo on a public multimedia campaign to highlight the positive contributions and important role that immigrants play in our community. The **New York Proud project** featured photographic portraits of immigrant New Yorkers displayed across NYC public transit. The portraits were accompanied by stories honoring the New York immigrant experience—vignettes of their lives in New York City, what brought them to America, and the integral role they play in their communities.

The pop-up photo exhibit lived on subway platforms and posters across all five NYC boroughs for more than a month, including a launch in Times Square. Each exhibit placement included a QR code and link to background information, interviews with participants, and **a toolkit designed by TOA for cultural strategists**. Through these public photo exhibitions in high-traffic areas and subway platforms, we were able to garner 9 million impressions and reach new audiences that we would not have otherwise.

Why It Matters:

Our goal for the campaign was to “flood the airwaves” with pro-immigrant content and help re-establish NYC’s history as a hub of pro-immigrant sentiment. The project leaned into this more nuanced view of contribution as something that goes beyond just labor. Rather, *immigrants are New Yorkers*—they are an integral part of the social and economic fabric of this city. This narrative builds power not just for immigrant communities, but *within* them. Embracing narrative change in this holistic sense became central to the campaign. Immigrant New Yorkers are our lawyers, our favorite chefs, our dance floor companions, and so many other essential members of our city.



Photo courtesy of TOA

