

FUTURE NARRATIVE 2:

Multiracial Democracy

Fear Narrative

The fear narrative surrounding American democracy is driven by the belief that traditional power structures—especially those that have long favored white men—are being dismantled. Those who subscribe to this narrative see themselves as defending the American Dream, their individual freedoms, and the limited power they feel they still have. It frames woke progressives as a direct threat to the “real” America—portraying efforts toward inclusion, equity, and justice as dangerous attempts to erase the country’s values and way of life.

Fear Narrative Values

Freedom

Democracy is about protecting the freedoms and individual liberties of “true Americans,” which is often used as a proxy for white Americans, particularly white cisgendered men.

Justice

Our departments of justice are responsible for maintaining “the American way of life” through rules, law, and order.

Ownership

Certain groups of people deserve democracy and the liberties and freedoms it provides, whereas others do not. This is often called “in-group bonding” and is a form of othering.



We all play a role when it comes to engaging in democracy—using our voices and actions. Democracy is an everyday job.

Future Narrative

Our society is stronger when we have a diverse and representative democracy where we work together to create freedom and opportunity for all. Everyone deserves to have a say in the decisions that affect them. While this vision of democracy is strong, the opposition is strategically limiting our freedoms and suppressing our voices. Participating civically, whether it be at the local or national level, is one of the greatest powers that we have to make our voices heard. We all play a role when it comes to engaging in democracy—using our voices and actions. Democracy is an everyday job.

Future Narrative Values

Freedom

Everyone deserves the freedom to be their true selves and make their own choices. When we set limitations on people’s rights to engage in the democratic process, we diminish our collective freedom.

Inter-dependence

We understand that opportunity is not only about personal success but also about our success as a collective.

Voice

We should all have a say in the decisions that affect us. Our voices must be heard in voting booths, at public forums, and across all media.

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.

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.

- Democracy is relevant for certain groups of people, but not all. For example, “Make America Great Again” suggests bringing America back to a time when many, specifically people of color, women, and immigrants, were excluded from inherent liberties and civic benefits.
- Democratic ideals are subjective and meant to uphold the status quo, rather than enable change.

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.

January 6th Insurrection

The January 6, 2020 storming of the Capitol demonstrated an alarming sense of ownership and disregard for the democratic process, in addition to horrifying political violence.

Widespread Voter Suppression

This is a decades-long practice used to exclude people of color from the democratic process. It's a tool rooted in systemic racism and the belief that certain groups of people don't deserve their legal right to vote.

Crackdowns on Campus Protests

The 2024 and 2025 college campus crackdowns raise the question: Whose freedom? Not everyone has the same liberties or freedoms in this country. The freedom to protest without repercussion is still a privilege.

FUTURE NARRATIVE

Underlying Beliefs

- Democracy extends to all of us, no matter our race, religion, or gender. We have a collective responsibility to participate in democracy and protect it. Yet it's important to remember that each of us has different levels of privilege in our fight for democracy. We are often fighting for those who are unable to have their voices heard or to be out on the street.
- We believe that, civically, our actions and choices have consequences. Our actions influence not just our own lives, but our wider communities.
- Things can change and improve, but it requires action and engagement by the American people. Democracy works, but it's an everyday job.

Mainstream Manifestations

Blocking Executive Orders

Judges and courts have blocked several of the Trump Administration's Executive Orders to protect our democratic institutions and constitutional rights.

Hands Off and No Kings Protests

The nationwide “Hands Off” and “No Kings” protests have been historic in scope, calling to protect our democracy, civil society, and the rights of all people in this country, including immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, women, and other marginalized groups.

Bold Leadership

Leaders and organizers are speaking out against the administration's attempts to undermine democratic institutions, condemning political violence, and warning about growing threats against free speech.



Photo Credit: Caroline Kroon



Photo Credit: Jason Leung via Unsplash

FUTURE NARRATIVE 2: MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY

VP SA BREAKDOWN

Value Statement:



Our society is stronger when we have a diverse and representative democracy where we work together to create freedom and opportunity for all. Everyone deserves to have a say in the decisions that affect them.

Name the Problem:



While this vision of democracy is strong, the opposition is strategically limiting our freedoms and suppressing our voices.

Guidance Toward Solution:

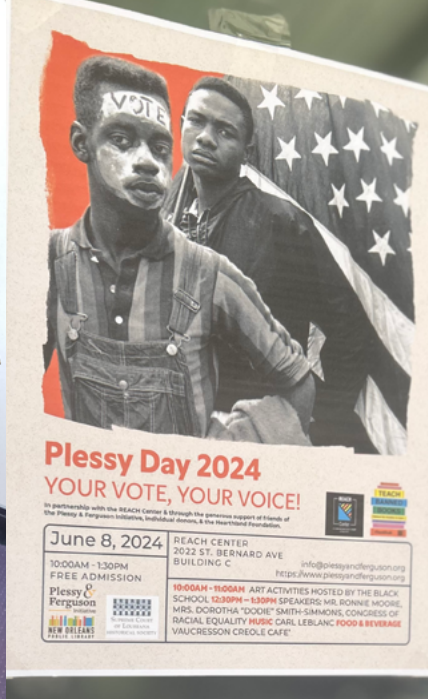


We all play a role when it comes to engaging in democracy. Democracy is an everyday job.

Collective Action:



We can use our voices and actions to reclaim the power bestowed upon us, whether in our own communities or beyond.



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This is life work. This is nothing that you're going to solve in your lifetime, but day by day, take it one step at a time and that's what matters. That's how all of us matter. This is not just I work or you work, but we work. We all have a call to answer.

— DIVINE CANDICE HENDERSON,
FRIENDS OF FREEDOM HOUSE

NARRATIVE INTERVENTION CASE STUDY #WeMatter New Orleans



What They Did:

In 2023, The Opportunity Agenda invited 23 artists and advocates who work in the South to join our Beyond Democracy cohort. The goal of this cohort-based research was to examine the thinking of potential and current Southern voters of color and explore their civic motivations by meeting them where their interests lie.

The #We Matter campaign was one powerful community-based project that developed from this cohort and its learnings. Divine Candice Henderson Chandler of Friends of Freedom House and Raymond D. Sweet of Hollygrove Dixon Neighborhood Association organized the New Orleans-based campaign, which centered on values identified in the research as having “high motivational potential for civic engagement.” These values were Community, Legacy, and Defiance.

To test the power of these values, Divine and Raymond applied them as “narrative frames” for scripted videos of local community leaders and elders who told their stories of civic engagement. The videos targeted disenchanted Millennial audiences and connected them with voting opportunities and local community groups through social media and local pop-ups.

Why It Matters:

The #WeMatter New Orleans campaign sought to bridge the gap between perceived powerlessness and the realization that collective voices hold substantial influence in shaping the democratic landscape. The videos highlighted local examples of civic activism with lasting impact, such as securing \$25 million to reopen an historic African American beach or adding Renter's Rights to the Parish charter. They included interviews with respected community leaders—Sage Michael, Keturah Butler-Reed, and Joy Banner—scripted and produced by the award-winning Sunstar Gate Productions.

The campaign tracked several examples of shifting civic engagement from apathy into action, including connecting local college students who originally had “no plans to vote” to resources that allowed them to develop a voting plan, including voting by proxy. During a #WeMatter event with community doulas, a portion of attendees who had decided to sit out a forthcoming election changed their minds about it after speaking with the #WeMatter representatives.

As a community intervention, #WeMatter New Orleans demonstrates the power that values-based narratives—especially those that have been tested—can wield in promoting cross-generational connections for civic engagement.