

FUTURE NARRATIVE 1:

Racial Justice

Fear Narrative

The fear narrative around Racial Justice is based on the belief and perceived feelings that promoting a “woke” social and political agenda rooted in racial justice, particularly Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)’, is meant to stifle excellence and opportunities, particularly of white people. This narrative hinges on a mythical America of the past, where meritocracy ruled and hard work was the ticket to success. The fear narrative claims the world has been co-opted by “anti-white” policies that give unfair access and opportunities to communities of color. This belief is rooted in scarcity-model thinking—those who have traditionally held social power fear they’re now losing it, which is a very motivating emotional driver.

Fear Narrative Values

- Merit

America rewards hard work. Everyone should be expected to put in the effort to earn their place, regardless of their background or race. Special treatment undermines the value of earning success.
- Personal Responsibility

In this country, you make your own path in life. People should be accountable for their choices, not blame the system or history for where they are today.
- Opportunity

America is a land of opportunity, where anyone can succeed if they make the right choices and work hard. When some groups are prioritized or given advantages, it threatens that promise of equal opportunity for all.

*These Future Over Fear narratives and recommendations reflect TOA research conducted and reviewed up until June 2025. We recognize that messaging recommendations within the narrative field may have changed beyond this date, based on newly developed research and the climate.

Future Narrative

The United States has always been thought of as the “land of opportunity.” Yet today, as it has been throughout history, institutions and systems deny people access to opportunities based on the color of their skin or ethnic background. At the same time, politicians have increasingly attacked programs that attempt to account for historical bias or inequities, blocking further progress. Learning, working, and living with people from different backgrounds and perspectives benefit us all. Our communities are made stronger when we embrace diversity and the inherent dignity of every individual. We must continue, steadfastly, in the movement toward racial justice and raise our voices to protect the values of opportunity, equity, and belonging. This is a fight for all of us.

Future Narrative Values

- Opportunity

Access to opportunity and the ability to thrive has been shaped by power structures that have deeply racist pasts and presents. Our systems need to account for how opportunity is shaped by these historical and current realities.
- Equity

Our civic fabric is deeper, our country is strengthened, and our culture flourishes when we prioritize equity.
- Diversity

Our communities are made stronger when we embrace diversity and the inherent dignity of every individual.
- Belonging

Racial Justice is essential work when it comes to developing a true sense of shared belonging and purpose across racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

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's not about skin color. This belief acknowledges that racism is despicable, but the anti-DEI efforts are not fundamentally racist; rather, they're about fairness. Rewarding hard work is not racist.
- Proud to be American. This centers on the message that "it needs to be okay to be American again, where embracing Christianity, family values, and freedom of speech isn't labeled as racist." This belief is rooted in the deeply emotional motivator of nostalgia, remembering the past as "better times" than the present.
- They're the Real Racists. The hypocritical "woke" obsession with race and social justice dogma is the real source of racism in this country. This is also commonly called "reverse racism."

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.

Rollback of Affirmative Action

In June 2023, the Supreme Court struck down race-based affirmative action in college admissions, ending decades of legal precedent allowing colleges to consider race in the admissions process.

Executive Orders Against DEI

In January and February 2025, President Trump issued a series of executive orders targeting DEI initiatives in the federal government, aiming to eliminate DEI programs and policies.

FUTURE NARRATIVE

Underlying Beliefs

- **Institutionalized inequality.** We need to get serious about taking on the racist systems that dominate our society and maintain hierarchies of power while exploiting communities of color.
- **Call it what it is.** Only if we work together to call out racism where we see it can we begin to build a more inclusive society from the ground up. By holding society accountable, we can move toward a more inclusive and equitable country together.
- **Expanding opportunity.** It is in everyone's interest to see that talented students from all backgrounds get a fair shot and have the chance to overcome obstacles to educational opportunity.

Mainstream Manifestations

Black Lives Matter Protests

BLM protests and the Movement for Black Lives ignited in 2020, following George Floyd's murder.

Consumer Boycotts

In the spring of 2025, consumers held Target and Dollar General accountable for rolling back their DEI policies.

15 Percent Pledge

More than 35 corporate businesses committed to dedicating 15% of their shelf space to Black-owned brands.



Photo Credit: Shot by Somali

FUTURE NARRATIVE 1: RACIAL JUSTICE

VPSA BREAKDOWN

Value Statement:



Learning, working, and living with people from different backgrounds and perspectives benefit us all. Our communities are made stronger when we embrace diversity and the inherent dignity of every individual.

Name the Problem:



Yet historically and to this day, people are denied access to opportunities based on the color of their skin or their ethnic background. Recently, we've seen increased attacks on DEI programs that try to account for historical bias or inequities.

Guidance Toward Solution:



Only if we work together to call out racism where we see it can we begin to build a more inclusive society from the ground up. By holding society accountable, we can move toward a more inclusive and equitable country together.

Collective Action:



We must continue, steadfastly, in the movement for racial justice and raise our voices to protect the values of opportunity, equity, and belonging. This is a fight for all of us.



A group of attendees and performers pose outside of Soakie's and its sign. (photograph by Gary Carrington, ca. 1994-2004. Licensed for use as part of Gary Carrington Collection of {B/qKC}).



SETTING THE STAGE (KANSAS CITY/COMMUNITY)

Image Credit: {B/qKC}



Through studying narrative research with TOA, I've been able to pinpoint what exactly it is that I want to dismantle—as a narrative idea—and how, specifically, I can do that in practice.

– NASIR ANTHONY MONTALVO, {B/qKC}

NARRATIVE INTERVENTION CASE STUDY {B/qKC} Black Queer Community Archive

{B/qKC}

What They Did:

The Opportunity Agenda's 2024-25 Culture and Narrative Fellow, Nasir Anthony Montalvo (they/them), is an award-winning transdisciplinary journalist and memory worker based in Kansas City, MO. As part of their Fellowship, Nasir developed a narrative intervention strategy for their ongoing project, [{B/qKC}](#), rooted in the practice of archiving.

{B/qKC} is a Black queer community archive based in Kansas City that challenges outdated archival practices through accessible storytelling—all within the frame and study of midwestern Black queer history. {B/qKC} has used traveling exhibitions, public art installations, dance parties, and investigative journalism to promote its research and mission.

Nasir's narrative project stems from researching Kansas City's only Black queer club, [Soakie's](#), which closed in 2004. Before being shut down by a government-sponsored gentrification project, Soakie's was a booming Black gay nightclub from 1993 to 2004. The bar served as a dazzling display of Kansas City's rich ballroom culture, Black queer camaraderie, and chosen family.

"There hasn't been a new Black queer space for us to convene, and the elders don't have a place either. Soakie's shutting down has affected the culture and community of Kansas City," Nasir said, adding that this was their motivation for launching {B/qKC}.

Why It Matters:

Nasir explains why archival practices are so important to the movement for racial justice: "When our world's historical record is constructed by a small group of people—and uncritically fed to us through standardized education, broadcast media, religion and more—we lose so many aspects of ourselves and our cultures. Through the archive, from a family recipe book to the Internet Archive, we preserve a fuller, more resilient record of our history."

As a next step in their project, Nasir has established a workshop series that "takes a hyper-local focus on Kansas City's history of gentrification." The aim is to help fellow activists learn more about community-based archiving.

Nasir will also be launching a searchable database for {B/qKC} at the end of 2025 so that audiences can easily access Black queer Kansas City artifacts. Through this database, Nasir hopes to create a place where the stories and experiences of the Black queer community can be digitally protected, celebrated, and cherished for years to come.

