

The background is a solid black field. It is decorated with several white geometric elements: a large, irregular white shape on the right side, and several thin, horizontal white lines of varying lengths scattered across the left and bottom portions of the frame.

**DRONE**  
**DRONE**



YOUR ECONOMIC  
STATUS IS A CHOICE™

that your economic status is a choice,  
that you don't work hard enough if you're poor.



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**Ryan Hills**  
Video + Post Production



## IN THE CHAT

*What is a trope you've learned about poverty or wealth? Where did you hear that message?*



***BROKE*** is an intervention for the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors to communicate justly about how the ***rich got rich*** and how the ***poor stay poor***.

# WHAT WE'LL COVER

What we learned  
collaborating across  
organizations

What we learned  
studying how  
organizations are  
telling stories

How to tell stories about  
economic inequality and  
solutions for systems  
change

How we approached  
design with intention

1

2

3

4



# WHAT WE LEARNED FROM COLLABORATING

**PUSHING THE BOUNDS OF  
PHILANTHROPY**

**+**

**WORKING ACROSS  
ORGANIZATIONS &  
ORGANIZATIONAL NORMS**



# WHO WE ARE



CENTER FOR  
PUBLIC INTEREST  
COMMUNICATIONS  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

## Center for Public Interest Communications

We help movements, agencies, foundations and organizations apply social, behavioral and cognitive science to build better communications strategies for the common good.



## The Radical Communicators (RadComms)

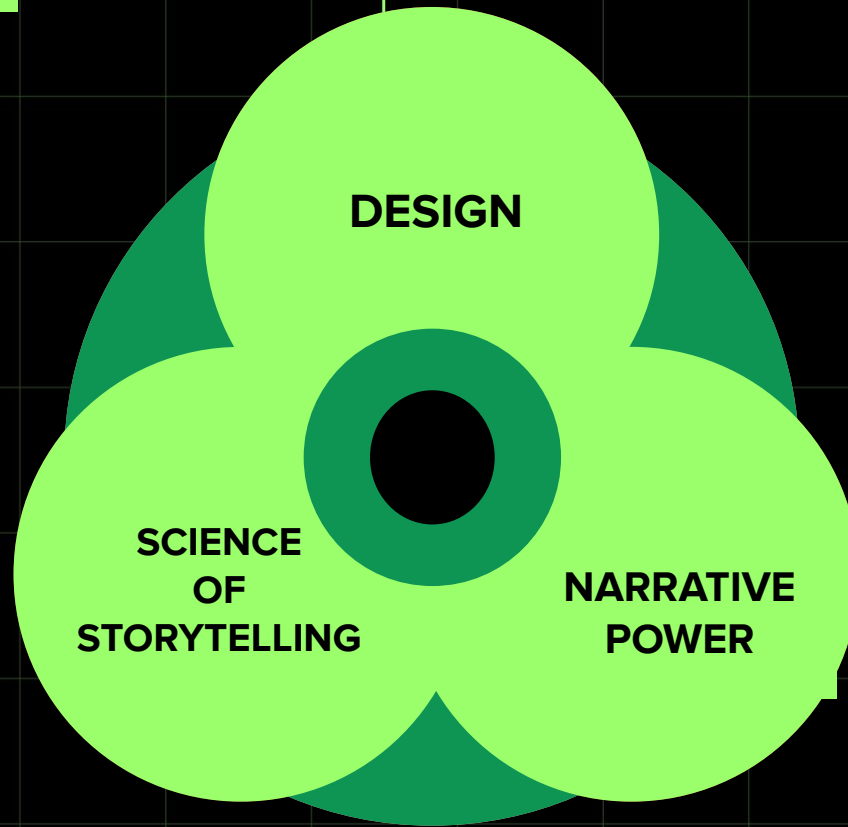
is a cross-movement community of practice for social justice communicators.



## MILLI

We're an award-winning, purpose-driven, creative agency specializing in strategy, content creation, and social media. Our mission is to leverage the power of technology, art, and culture to create a more connected, engaging, and just world.

# CROSS-DISCIPLINE COLLABORATION



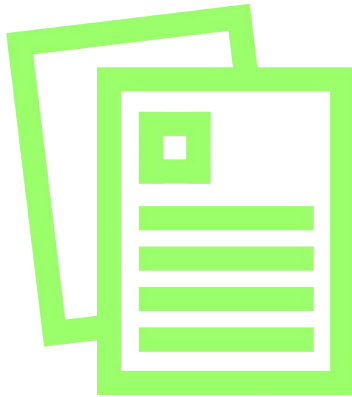


**ADD TO THE CHAT OR  
RAISE YOUR HAND**

*What are some things you would like to do, but feel restricted by the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors?*

## **2. WHAT WE LEARNED STUDYING HOW ORGANIZATIONS ARE TELLING STORIES**

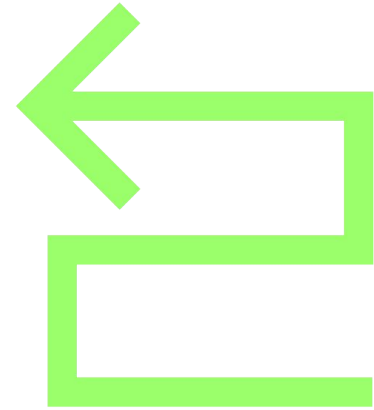
# WHAT WE DID



**Literature  
Review**



**Content  
Analysis**

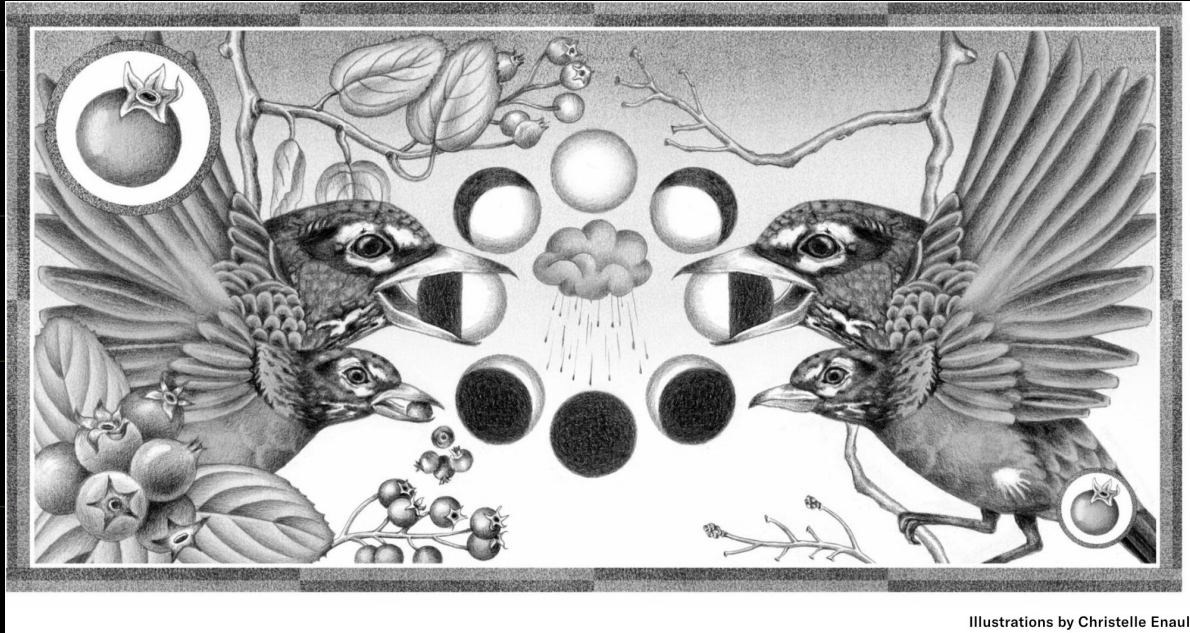


**Interviews**

# LOOKING BACK AT NARRATIVES OF POVERTY AND WEALTH



# NARRATIVE HISTORY



*Pre-colonization/pre-capitalism:*

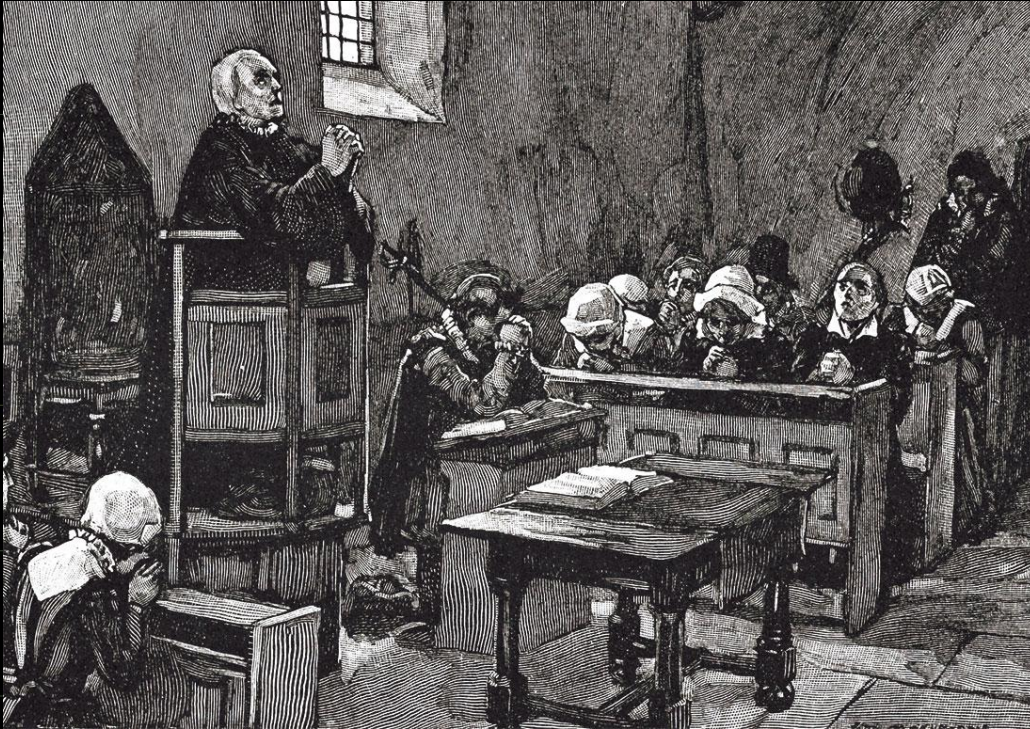
*Reciprocity*

*Interdependence*

*Care*

**Gift economies.**

# NARRATIVE HISTORY



**1600s:**  
*Predestination*  
The “undeserving poor”

*Protestant Work Ethic*  
Work and wealth as morally good

# NARRATIVE HISTORY



**1800s:**

***Individualism***

***(aka Bootstraps/Meritocracy myth)***

**Blames individuals for their failures,  
credits them for their successes.**



**RAISE YOUR HAND,  
ADD TO THE CHAT**

*What are some narratives around poverty/wealth that you see nonprofits and philanthropy using?*



# LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations share stories of individuals who were able to become contributing members of a capitalist society by joining the middle class or starting businesses.

Organizations share partial stories about poor people, only sharing aspects of their lives related to being poor or getting out of poverty.

Stories about people in other countries oversimplify [AC or glorify] poverty by featuring people in pastoral settings.

People who live in poverty are often absent from the stories told about them.

The stories told promote individual-level change over system-level change, even when the organization acknowledges systemic changes are needed.

Organizations do not share many stories about wealth.

# CONTENT ANALYSIS

**75%**

of the organizations were not telling stories with a beginning, middle and end, conflict and resolution; characters and setting.

**41%**

of the stories framed poor people as being in need of saving.

**31%**

Of stories included reference to systems of oppression. However, more than half did not reference race and racism.

**40%**

Of stories represented poor people as a homogenous group of people.

**70 %**

of the stories featured organizations with power. Less than half of the stories included characters as having power.

**Based on analysis of 27 pieces of content from 10 organizations**



**ADD TO THE CHAT**

*What are your reflections on these findings?*

# **3. HOW TO TELL STORIES ABOUT ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND SOLUTIONS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE**

# BRIGHT SPOTS



*Coalition of Immokalee Farm Workers*

*Southerners on New Ground*

*Migrant Justice*

*Invisible People*

*Action Center on Race and the Economy*

*Economic Security Project*



# HOW TO TELL STORIES FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

1. Tell compelling stories by applying the Science Of Story Building
2. Tell stories about individuals navigating systems and engaging in collective action to disrupt power
3. Create space for people to come together and talk about systems
4. Problematize current narratives
5. Use justice frames in storytelling
6. Build the capacity of communities to share stories
7. Use visual images and language to engage communities
8. Be intentional with the language you use
9. Amplify stories—ethically



A black and white photograph of a person holding a flag that says 'FIGHT FOR \$15'. The person is wearing a cap and a watch. The background shows trees and a building. The image is partially obscured by a red geometric shape on the right side.

# HOW TO TELL STORIES ABOUT ECONOMIC JUSTICE

2. Tell stories about individuals navigating systems and engaging in collective action to disrupt power
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# TELL STORIES ABOUT SYSTEMS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

**SONG**  
SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND

**WE ORGANIZE**

*We Build Power, We Win*

**BROKE  
BROKE**

**YOUR TURN**

**HOW CAN YOU TELL STORIES THAT  
FEATURE SYSTEMS AS SETTINGS  
AND CHARACTERS ENGAGING IN  
COLLECTIVE ACTION?**

# USE JUSTICE FRAMES IN STORYTELLING





FARM  
WORKER  
RIGHTS  
ARE A  
BIGGIE

WHOSE  
HANDS  
PICKED YOUR  
FOOD?

WENDY'S  
EXPLOITS  
FARM  
WORKERS

WENDY'S  
EXPLOITS  
FARM  
WORKERS

NO  
PARKING  
TOW-AWAY

**YOUR TURN**

**HOW CAN YOU FRAME THE  
PROBLEM AND SOLUTION AS  
IN/JUSTICE?**

# **BUILD THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES TO SHARE THEIR STORIES**



FEDERAL  
UNITED STATES  
UNITED STATES

JUSTICIA MIGRANTE



*Human  
Rights*

*Derechos  
Humanos*

I WANT JUSTICE



**YOUR TURN**

**HOW WILL YOU WORK WITH  
COMMUNITIES TO TELL THEIR OWN  
STORIES?**

**AMPLIFY STORIES—ETHICALLY**



**YOUR TURN**

**HOW WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF THE  
STORYTELLERS?**

## "The cows don't milk themselves"





## 4. HOW WE APPROACHED DESIGN WITH INTENTION

## Dignity and Power:

Telling truth and seeking justice in a broken economic system.

MOTTO



**PROVOKE** ○ **ILLUMINATE**

**INSPIRE** ○ **ENGAGE**

**REWRITE**

## Empowering and transformative storyteller.

**Listener** ○ **Storyteller**

Forward **Thinker** ○ Truth **Speaker**

**Teacher** ○ **Strategist**

**Relentless** ○ **Unrelenting**

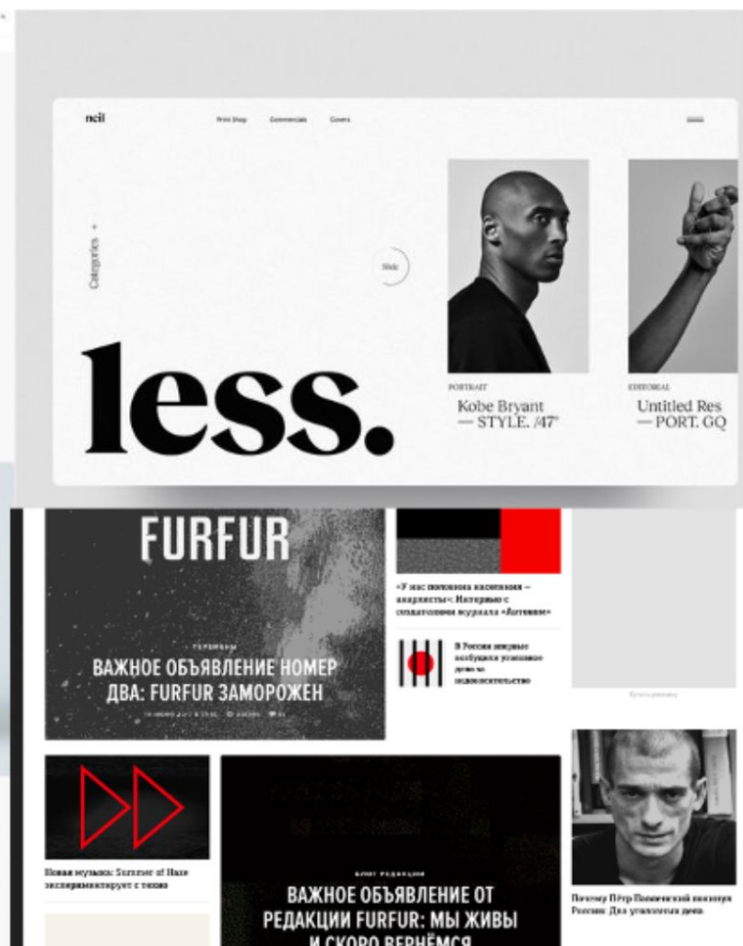
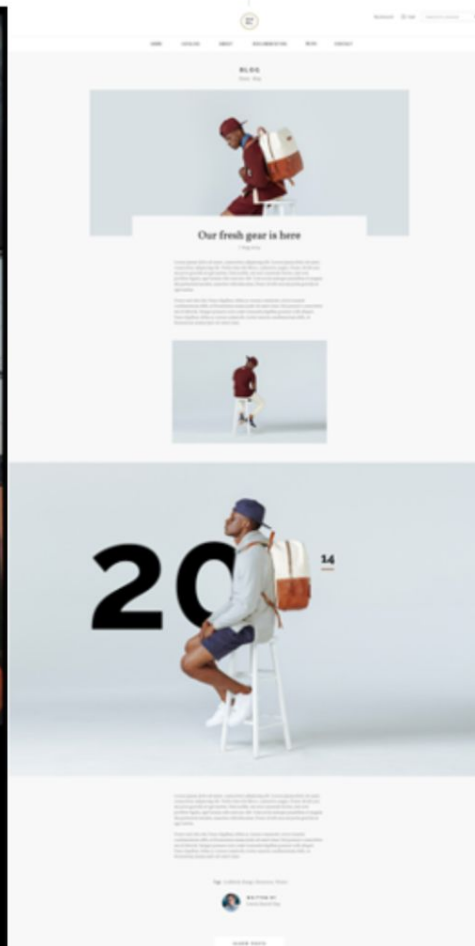
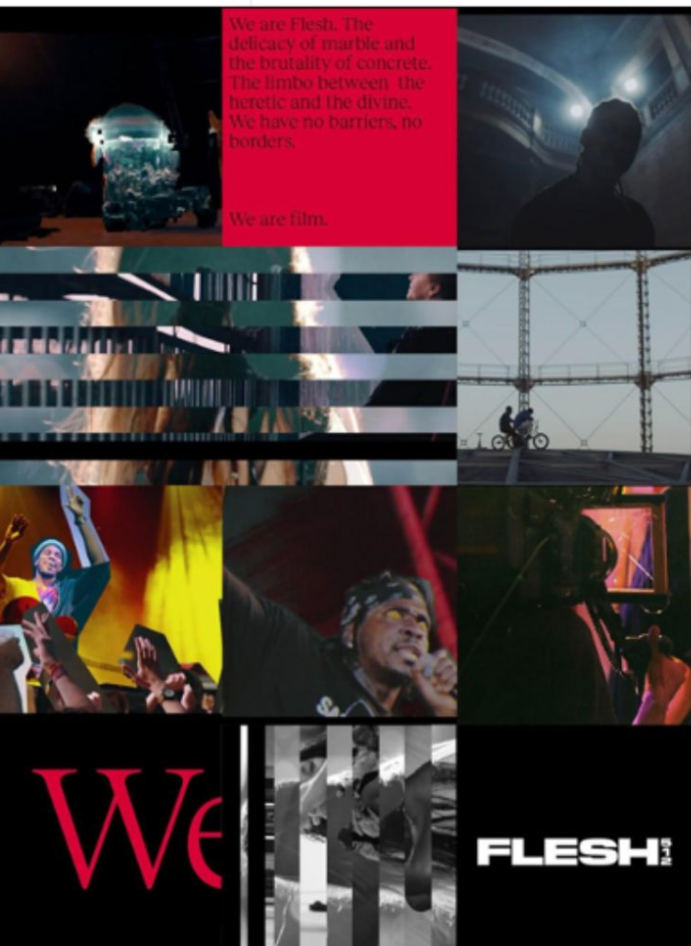
**Powerful** ○ **Empowering**

**Intersectional** ○ **Open**

CHARACTERISTICS



# VISUAL TREATMENT



1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8

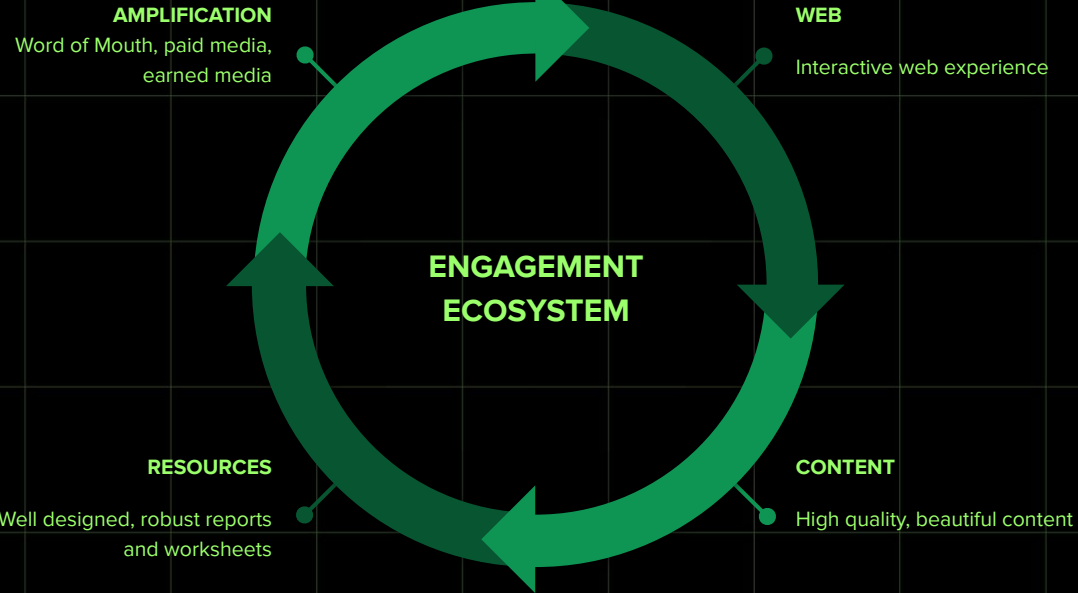


## HOW THE NONPROFIT AND PHILANTHROPIC SECTORS ARE TALKING ABOUT POVERTY—AND HOW WE CAN DO BETTER

Despite considerable grassroots energy and a body of tools and resources on progressive economic justice communications and organizing, our research shows that organizations in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors are reinforcing repressive, victim-blaming narratives that shift fault and responsibility for poverty from greedy corporations and unfair laws to ordinary people. There are stories that designate some poor people as more deserving than others, and that use exploitative images and descriptions of poor people of color to engender pity but fall short of justice and meaningful action.

In the 21st century, in the eye of the fourth industrial revolution, our mandate is to communicate about class, socioeconomic status (the combination of class, status, and power), labor, deservingness (a kind of worth that is directly tied to social definitions of who has value and who does not), wealth, and quality of life in ways that do not continue to advantage one group or one type of work over another. In addition, we reject false solutions that protect corporate interests and throw away good, socially democratic public programs that would otherwise benefit millions of people.

In this report, we share insights from our research to identify harmful narratives perpetuated by well-meaning organizations in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, primarily in the United States. We also celebrate organizations telling transformative stories of poor people navigating and changing broken systems, challenging problematic narratives, organizing collective action to drive change, and creating economic alternatives. We focused our attention on these sectors to explore how we are telling stories about poverty and wealth, where we are doing it well, and where we can do better.





## **3 TIPS FOR INCORPORATING INTENTIONAL DESIGN:**

- 1. Involve your design team / designer from the beginning**
- 2. Map your audience's journey / engagement ecosystem**
- 3. Leverage technology for flexible templates (e.g. Google Slides, Canva)**

**“THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IS TO MAKE THE  
REVOLUTION IRRESISTIBLE.”**

**- Toni Cade Bambara**

A black and white photograph of a person wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses, holding up a large banner that reads 'FIGHT FOR \$15'. The banner features a silhouette of a person. The background shows trees and a building. The image is partially obscured by a dark grey overlay on the right side, which contains the title and list.

# HOW TO TELL STORIES FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

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**QUESTIONS + OBSERVATION**



***THANK  
YOU***

**brokeproject.org**

***BROKE  
BROKE***



“

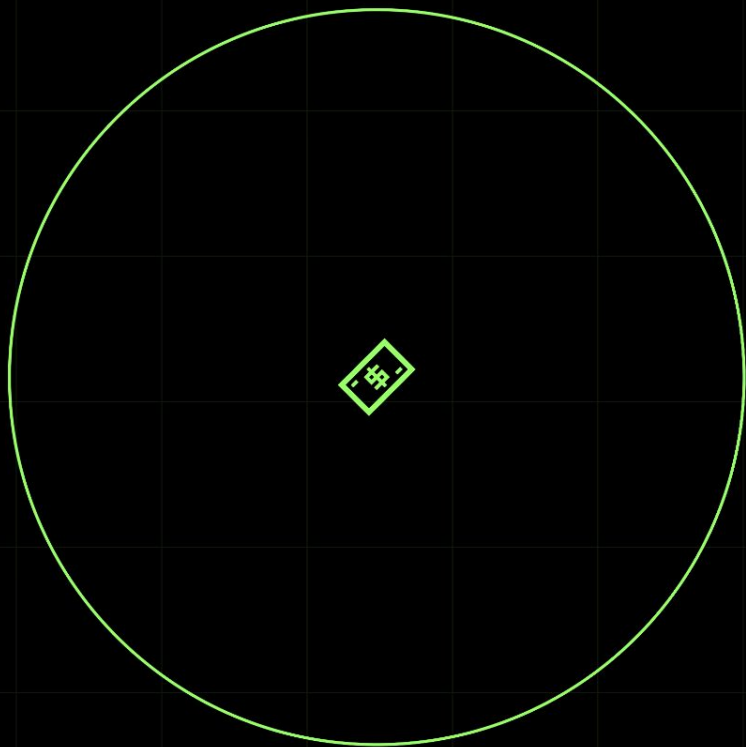
***Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things.***

ISABEL WILKERSON, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*

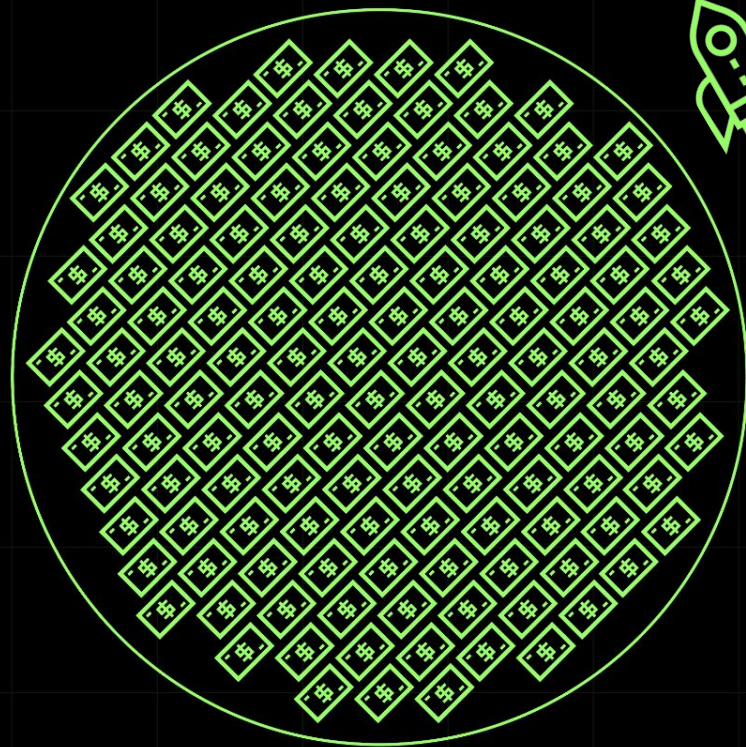
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***Media is the primary mechanism through which ideology is shared and learned.***



Working people got \$600 unemployment checks  
(many governors cut those off early to starve  
people who would not “go back to work.”)



Billionaires' wealth increased by \$3.9B between  
March 18 and December 30, 2020.

# PROBLEM

Anti-poverty organizations in the impact sector share a narrative that frames ending poverty as successfully integrating poor people into the existing capitalist system.

Success is defined by a person or community's ability to successfully “work” their way out of poverty.



Organizations share stories of individuals who were able to become contributing members of a capitalist society by joining the middle class or starting businesses.

Organizations share partial stories about poor people, only sharing aspects of their lives related to being poor or getting out of poverty.

Stories about people in other countries oversimplify [AC or glorify] poverty by featuring people in pastoral settings.

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Organizations do not share stories about wealth.



# THEORY OF CHANGE

If we call on activists, nonprofits, charities, donors and funders to tell just, accurate stories about poverty and wealth, we can weaken the harmful narratives that hold in place our current economic, social, and political systems, in order to end poverty and create a world where everyone's needs are met, and where new stories are grounded in truth, liberation, and empathy.



The story we're told about **WHY** people can't "**move up**" in class status is characterized in a way that blames and shames the poor for being poor – because by placing the blame on individual poor people, the network of oppressive economic infrastructure that keeps the rich rich remains safe.

“

*Out of deep conditions of domination and exclusion, people create their own insights, understandings, knowledge, and narratives.*

”





