



**RACE CLASS**  
NARRATIVE ACTION

**REGIONWIDE HANDOUT**

2020



# MIDWEST RACE CLASS NARRATIVE ACTION

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Stoking racial resentment, wrapped in faux economic populism, has long proven critical to enticing white voters in the Midwest and beyond. Meanwhile people of color, young people and many women are blocked from the political process and left feeling like outsiders by narratives that stay silent on fundamental human rights or downgrade them to special interests. In response, progressive organizations in MI, MN, MO, OH, PA and WI came together to apply and extend the original Race Class Narrative (RCN) Project<sup>1</sup> in order to uncover effective ways of persuading the middle and mobilizing a justifiably disenchanted base with a narrative rooted in race, class and gender tailored to each particular state context. This brief outlines key insights and messaging recommendations based on research done across these states including our demographic oversamples.<sup>2</sup>

## Core Insights

- Effective messages follow a set order: shared value, problem, solution. In contrast, leading with problems makes our solutions seem less credible. It primes people's understandable cynicism and reluctance to get involved.
- For narratives and distinct wording choices to work, they must be heard over and over again which requires that people be willing to repeat them. Messages about enacting solutions and promoting a desirable future garner greater enthusiasm from our base and prove more persuasive to the middle than those centered on addressing problems.
- Speak about race, class and gender as interconnected: Describe the shared values that exist across these lines. Call out the ways our opposition divides us by race and gender, or shames and blames particular groups in order to distract us while they hand kickbacks to the richest 1% and keep us from uniting for our economic wellbeing.
- Messages about division and scapegoating, as opposed to just financial concerns, are powerful ways to connect the targeted harms done to particular groups to the financial hardships familiar to many. However, it's vital to guard against claims that we are the ones sowing discord. We do this by first naming what we hold in

common and, when we describe our solutions, including explicit calls for cross racial solidarity to make this a place where fairness, freedom and prosperity are for all of us, no exceptions.

## Respondents Across Six States<sup>3</sup>

These respondents were grouped based on their responses to questions around worldviews toward race, wealth, and the role of government.

<b>Base</b> (25% of voters)	<b>Persuadable</b> (50% of voters)	<b>Opposition</b> (25% of voters)
<p>Strongly believe government should create opportunity</p> <p>View wealth as largely product of circumstances</p> <p>Believe people of color face greater barriers than whites</p> <p>Support our policy agenda</p>	<p>Of mixed minds on role of government, origins of wealth, benefits to talking about race</p> <p>Support our policies yet also lured by opposition on questions of race, gender and government</p>	<p>Strongly believe government should get out of the way</p> <p>Think wealth is product of individual effort</p> <p>Reject need to tackle racism and believe things have “shifted too far” on gender equity</p>

**More likely to be Democratic, under 50 and African American**

**More likely to be women while other demographics mirror those of residents in these states**

**More likely to be men, over 50, Republican or Independent**

## Top Rated Overall and Issue Narratives<sup>4</sup>

### **AMERICA'S/STATE<sup>5</sup> STRENGTH**

America's strength comes from our ability to work together – bringing together people from different places and of different races into a whole. For this to be a place where everyone can thrive, we cannot let the 1% and the politicians they pay for divide us against each other based on what someone looks like, where they come from, or how much money they have. We need to join together to fight for our future, just like we won better wages, safer workplaces, and civil rights in our past. Coming together, we can elect new leaders who will deliver better healthcare for our families, quality schools for our kids, and a fair return on our work.

### **RACE, CLASS AND GENDER**

Most of us work hard for our families, no matter what we look like or where we come from. But today, a powerful few pit us against each other, blocking our efforts to ensure a fair return on our work and paid time to care for our families, affordable childcare for our kids and quality healthcare for our loved ones – [and even restricting our rights to make decisions about our own bodies.] By joining together to rewrite the rules, we can ensure every one of us, whether we're women or men, young or old, White or Black, can care for our families, have our voices heard and our rights respected.

### **FAIR SHARE (RCN APPLIED TO REVENUE)<sup>6</sup>**

Most of us want to leave things better for those to come, no matter what we look like or where we're from. But today, the richest 1% grab record profits, while refusing to contribute to the services the rest of us pitch in for and everyone uses. This powerful few pit us against each other based on what we look like or what our zip code is so we won't close the loopholes they exploit or raise the revenue we need. Together, we can make sure that those who have done well in [state], do right by [state]. By rewriting the rules so everyone contributes, we can provide healthcare for our families, quality schools for our kids, and a better life for generations to come.

# Issue Responses

We tested different approaches to promote progressive policies and most effectively combat opposition claims. These are our most effective messages for engaging our base and persuading the middle on these issue arguments across states and oversamples.

<b>Rebuttals Against Opposition Claims<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>Base Agreement</b> (% agreeing with opposition statement)	<b>Persuable Agreement</b> (% agreeing with oppo. statement)
<b>[Immigrant Rights]</b> For America to be the 'land of the free and home of the brave' we need to respect and embrace people with the courage and tenacity to move for a better life.	<b>89%</b> (8%)	<b>49%</b> (38%)
<b>[Police Reform]</b> We need to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our communities and that requires training police in de-escalation and anti-bias and ensuring they uphold their oath to protect and serve all.	<b>81%</b> (16%)	<b>44%</b> (45%)
<b>[Countering Fear Mongering]</b> We need elected leaders who will reject Trump's divide and conquer tactics and put working people first, whether we're White, Black, or Brown	<b>88%</b> (9%)	<b>44%</b> (41%)

Rebuttals Against Opposition Claims <sup>7</sup>	Base Agreement (% agreeing with opposition statement)	Persuadable Agreement (% agreeing with oppo. statement)
<p><b>[Countering Anti-government, Trickle Down Economics]</b> To make life better for working people we need to invest in education, create better paying jobs, and make healthcare more affordable for White, Black, and Brown people struggling to make ends meet.</p>	<p><b>91%</b> (8%)</p>	<p><b>62%</b> (27%)</p>

## Words that Work

Embrace	Replace	Explanation
Certain politicians; a handful of CEOs; some corporations	Politicians; CEOs; corporations; the wealthy	Respondents reject absolutes, even implied ones.
[Naming villains] Richest 1%	Billionaires; Top 1%	Persuadable and base voters are equally receptive to these labels but “richest 1%” alienates the opposition more.
[Naming goal] Move toward greater equality	Make things better	Persuadable and base voters are more motivated by explicit calls for equality.
Unions of working people	Labor unions	Despite the greater familiarity of “labor unions,” “unions of working people” makes the members focal and thus garners greater approval.

Embrace	Replace	Explanation
<p>For America to be the 'land of the free and home of the brave' we need to respect and embrace people with the courage and tenacity to move for a better life</p>	<p>People who move here to make a better life for their families help make this a stronger, more prosperous nation</p>	<p>Tying to core values of freedom and underscoring immigrants' courage and tenacity is a more effective rebuttal to anti-immigrant claims than describing how they benefit the nation. This holds true for respondents who are immigrants themselves.</p>
<p>To make life better for working people we need to invest in education, create better paying jobs, and make healthcare more affordable for White, Black, and Brown people struggling to make ends meet</p>	<p>To make life better for working people we need to make things right for those who are being harmed the most today, especially African Americans and immigrants</p>	<p>A race-class narrative approach that builds toward cross-racial solidarity is more motivating and persuasive than one rooted in ideas of racial repair.</p>
<p>Ensuring women and men are equal in our society is largely a matter of men changing how they treat the women in their lives</p>	<p>Ensuring women and men are equal in our society is largely a matter of women changing what they expect of men in their lives</p>	<p>Focusing on men's behavior and how it should evolve elicited strong agreement and more productive engagement on gender equity.</p>

## Contact Information

Please direct any inquiries regarding this summary to [info@raceclassnarrativeaction.com](mailto:info@raceclassnarrativeaction.com)

## Endnotes

1. Race-Class Narrative Project, lead by Ian Haney López, Anat Shenker-Osorio, and Heather McGhee, 2018.
2. Present research fielded January 31 to February 25, 2020 and consists of six online state dial surveys from a voter-file matched panel (N=600 voters per state), regional oversamples of AAPI voters (N=403), Latinx voters (N=186), African American voters (N=215), and union member respondents (N=797), as well as a national survey of Spanish speaking adults (N=401) reflecting an unweighted sample size of N=4404. Margin of error of +/- 1.48% at the 95th confidence interval. Critically, we continue to experiment with a refine recommendations based on the rapidly shifting realities of COVID-19 and how these are altering public opinion.
3. These groupings were generated through cluster analysis of responses to questions on race, wealth, and the role of government.
4. Messages have been adapted from what was dial tested in order to incorporate learnings from moment to moment responses and other survey questions.
5. Across states, except PA, we tested a tailored version of this message that named state and lifted up values core to its identity. This version is adapted from the one tested in PA and in our demographic oversamples across the region.
6. Note that issue-specific narratives, especially about revenue and role of government, are always lower rated than general ones. This represents the most effective argument form for making a pro-active case for taxes.
7. Rebuttals were split-sampled and the more effective formulation appears here.