



The **Opportunity** Agenda

American Opportunity A Communications Toolkit

Tools, tips, and techniques for building the national
will to expand opportunity for all.



PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION
WITH THE SPIN PROJECT



The SPIN Project and The Opportunity Agenda are proud to bring you *American Opportunity: A Communications Toolkit*. Opportunity is the idea that everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, should have a fair chance at reaching their full potential. This is a new and powerful take on the American Dream, and this toolkit is intended to help leaders and organizers working on a wide range of social justice issues begin to leverage the core American value of “Opportunity for All” in their communications work.

We believe that speaking about your issue in terms of opportunity is a good strategic choice. Opportunity is an ideal that most Americans instinctively support, and including messages about opportunity can help you to communicate your vision for positive social change.

Americans tend to react better to positive messages than to negative ones. Using messages about opportunity allows us to present our work in a hopeful, forward-looking way, and to challenge our fellow Americans to support policies that protect and expand opportunity—something they already see as a fundamental right.

Perhaps most importantly, the theme of opportunity connects organizations working on a wide variety of issues, and it is designed to be echoed. The messages, stories, and tools you will find here are ready to be incorporated into your work. Together, we can create a diverse and powerful chorus of voices calling for real, positive change to protect and expand opportunity in America.



About this Toolkit

This toolkit represents the best thinking about how to use the **Opportunity Frame** from the communications professionals at the SPIN Project, the leaders of The Opportunity Agenda, other communications professionals engaged in defining the **Opportunity Frame** and grassroots leaders from across the country working on critically important issues.

Part I contains an introduction to the **Opportunity Frame** from the leaders of The Opportunity Agenda; a summary of the key findings from their first publication: *The State of Opportunity in America* report; an essay from Loren Siegel, former Public Education Director of the American Civil Liberties Union and a communications and strategic planning consultant; and an annotated speech by Senator Barack Obama demonstrating a powerful use of the **Opportunity Frame**. In Part II, we provide you with the concrete tools you'll need to start including messages about opportunity in your own work. Finally, Part III examines promising practices in using the **Opportunity Frame** in specific issue areas.

About The Opportunity Agenda

www.opportunityagenda.org

The Opportunity Agenda is a communications, research, and advocacy organization that is building the national will to expand opportunity in America. We work to ensure that the United States lives up to its promise as the land of opportunity for every person who lives here. In collaboration with other groups and leaders, we pursue innovative efforts that:

- **Connect Americans through core values.** Americans believe in the values of equality, community, and human dignity as cornerstones of opportunity. We develop ways of rooting social change efforts in opportunity themes and speaking in a language that unites diverse communities.
- **Change the public discourse.** We work with advocates and other public commentators to explain the threats to opportunity in America and the steps that are needed to realize our nation's full potential.
- **Translate ideas into policy.** We highlight innovative practices and policies that expand opportunity, capture the imagination, and improve people's lives.

The Opportunity Agenda is a project of the Tides Center. Visit us at www.opportunityagenda.org.

About the SPIN Project

www.spinproject.org

The SPIN Project is a nonprofit group of communications specialists who build communications capacity in grassroots organizations across the nation. SPIN helps organizations increase their effectiveness in influencing debate, shaping public opinion, and garnering positive media attention. We work toward a stronger democracy in which people enhance and actively participate in the public discourse. To best meet the needs of our clients, we offer:

- **Communications Audits**
- **Communications Strategy Development**
- **Skills Building and Leadership Development**
- **Communications Coaching**
- **Organizational Communications Infrastructure**
- **Campaign Support**
- **Peer Networking**
- **Customized Communications Conferences**
- **Publications**

The SPIN Project works with a broad range of organizing, advocacy, and policy organizations, all of which work to strengthen democracy and public participation. Our clients typically focus on issues concerning civil rights, human rights, social justice, and the environment. The SPIN Project honors the multiracial, multicultural, diverse constituencies of the groups we train. We invite you to visit our website at www.spinproject.org or contact us if you would like to discuss our services.



Part

— The Opportunity Frame

The **Opportunity** Agenda

By **Alan Jenkins, Executive Director**
Phoebe Eng, Creative Director
Brian Smedley, Ph.D., Research Director

In this toolkit, you will find ways to communicate your values, concerns, and solutions through the powerful frame of Opportunity in America. Why opportunity? In our discussions with diverse leaders, our research on public opinion and media coverage, and our conversations with Americans from different walks of life, *the most positive, hopeful, and empowering articulation of our shared values and goals consistently evokes the theme of opportunity.*

The American ideal of opportunity is deeply imbedded in our national consciousness. It embodies our highest aspirations as a people and, though we've never fully achieved it, opportunity represents much of what we seek to accomplish in our work for social justice. Opportunity is about fairness and participation, human rights, and human dignity. It binds us together as a diverse nation and it offers profound hope for the future.

Opportunity, we believe, is a theme that can unite progressive messages and constituencies while building bridges across a range of issues, including civil and human rights, health care, housing, education, employment, criminal justice, and other spheres where opportunity is at risk. In promoting this inclusive approach, our intention is not to gloss over or homogenize these individual issues—each of which warrants focused attention and distinct solutions—but to help build a powerful and diverse alliance of voices for change.

The **Opportunity Frame** has a number of elements:

Evoking shared national values. The ideal of opportunity represents *specific positive values* that we must reinvigorate. Opportunity means that everyone has a fair chance to achieve his or her full potential as a human being. It means equal treatment, economic security and mobility, a voice in decisions that affect us, a chance to start over after missteps or misfortune, and a sense of responsibility toward each other as a people. Ensuring that we all have a fair chance is a promise that America makes to everyone who lives here. It is not just good policy; it is among our inalienable human rights. Our government and institutions, therefore, have an important responsibility to protect and expand opportunity for this and future generations.

Evoking the narrative of American opportunity does *not* mean appealing to blind nationalism or ignoring the challenges faced by those outside our borders. Rather, it means understanding that most Americans simultaneously hold in their minds great hope and pride about what our country has to offer and real disappointment about what we've failed to do as a nation. Addressing both sets of beliefs is important to engaging people to support change.

Emphasizing opportunity for all. Communicating our concerns and goals in terms of our *shared destiny*, and the forces—good and bad—that connect us, opens up new conversations and moves us toward hope and away from harmful framing of social justice issues in terms of individualism, competition, and blame.

Balancing the threat and the promise. The Opportunity Frame is a *predominantly positive* one that assumes our nation's ability to overcome any problem and always offers positive solutions for doing so. Emphasizing *solutions* taps into Americans' pride and counters

Foreword



“compassion fatigue,” in which people see a parade of social problems as impossible to solve. Effective use of the opportunity narrative cites evidence to demonstrate that opportunity is at risk for all Americans and that many Americans are facing multiple barriers to opportunity that cannot be overcome solely through hard work and perseverance alone. At the same time, it argues that our society can expand opportunity for all through leadership and specific policies that embody our values.

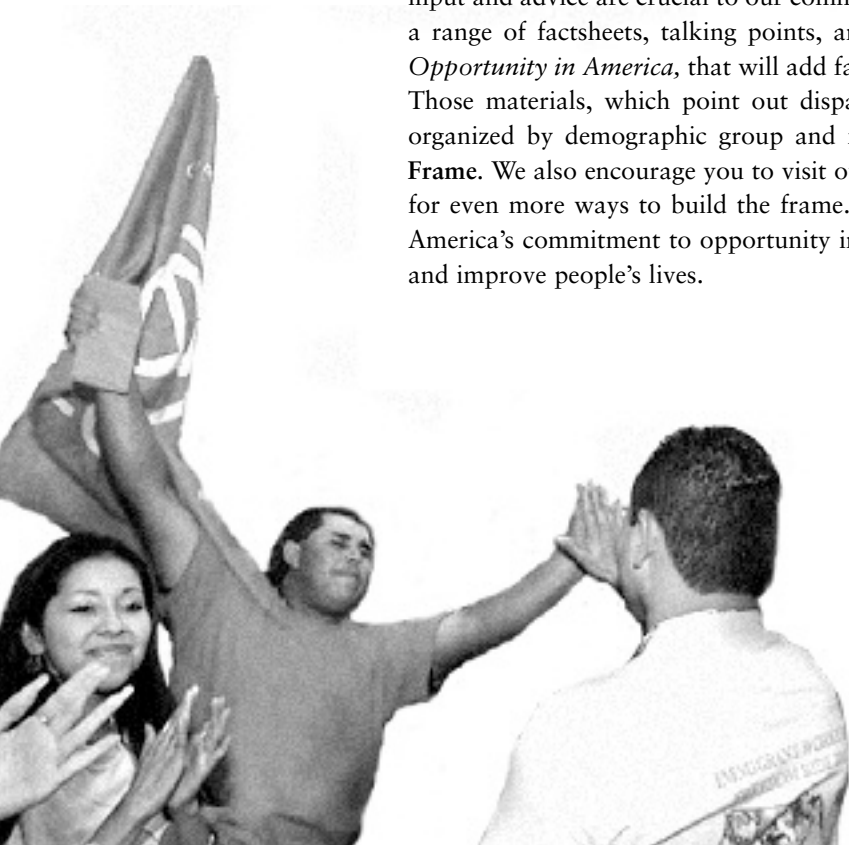
Connecting human stories to a broader context. Sharing the stories, struggles, and successes of real people is essential to effective communications. Yet, research and experience show that focusing on individual stories—be they positive or negative—causes audiences to attribute success and failure to individual effort rather than systemic opportunity, and to support individual, rather than societal, solutions. That effect is amplified when the story reinforces negative stereotypes about racial and other groups. So we need to begin telling real stories designed to convey *systemic* problems and *societal and policy solutions*—for example, telling the story of health care workers or job trainers working to expand opportunity for all, or showing similarly-situated yet diverse groups of people (e.g., farm workers, students, domestic workers, asthma patients) facing vastly different opportunities because of different policies or societal responses.

Countering stereotypes and bias. The dynamics of identity—race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, and other aspects of who we are—can profoundly affect how different audiences understand a story. The **Opportunity Frame** seeks to *anticipate and vigorously disarm stereotypes* and to rigorously document discrimination and inequality for skeptical audiences.

Spreading opportunity across borders. Though rooted in American ideals, the **Opportunity Frame** is universal in its values and international in its aspirations for fairness and human achievement. Clearly, Americans are privileged in comparison to people in most other countries, and the **Opportunity Frame**, which draws its inspiration from international human rights principles, is relevant for promoting social justice at the global as well as the national level.

Adding layers and texture to the **Opportunity Frame** is work that we can only do together, and your input and advice are crucial to our common success. In the Web version of this toolkit you will find a range of factsheets, talking points, and other resources drawn from our report, *The State of Opportunity in America*, that will add factual weight to your efforts on messaging for opportunity. Those materials, which point out disparities in opportunity and potential policy solutions, are organized by demographic group and issue to help you build a more customized **Opportunity Frame**. We also encourage you to visit our “Get Involved” and “Policy Center” sections of the site for even more ways to build the frame. We believe that, working together, it’s possible to renew America’s commitment to opportunity in ways that move hearts and minds, change public policy, and improve people’s lives.

Visit
www.opportunityagenda.org
for more!





Overview of *The State of Opportunity in America* Report

By Brian Smedley, Ph.D., Research Director, The Opportunity Agenda

The sister publication to this toolkit, our report, *The State of Opportunity in America*, provides a comprehensive, objective assessment of the nation's progress toward expanding opportunity for all, measured across core values that must exist for America and Americans to flourish to their full potential. We hope this report, available on our website at www.opportunityagenda.org, is a data resource for you as you apply some of the recommendations included in this toolkit.



To be sure, the nation has made great strides in expanding opportunity for many. Forward-thinking policies have helped to expand the middle class, create a viable safety net, and establish legal protections against official segregation and overt exclusion of marginalized groups. But *The State of Opportunity in America* report shows that we still have a long way to go in ensuring opportunity for all, and it sets out effective measures for getting there.

In many very important respects, American opportunity is in trouble. Among the noteworthy findings in this report:

- **The number of uninsured Americans—more than 45 million in the most recent U.S. Census estimate—has reached a record high.** Immigrants, minorities, and low-income families are more likely to be uninsured than their counterparts. Most of the uninsured are in working families, and all are at greater risk of health problems and financial ruin.
- **Wage inequality is now greater than it was three decades ago.** Wages increased less than one percent in adjusted dollars between 1979 and 2003 for those in the bottom decile of wage-earners, but increased by 27 percent among the top wage-earning decile during the same period. White men enjoyed the greatest income growth over the last three decades, while an increasing share of Hispanic men earned poverty-level and near-poverty-level wages.
- **The gender wage gap has narrowed over the last three decades, but women still earn 81 cents for every dollar that men earn.** In addition, women with higher levels of education currently face a *larger* wage gap relative to comparably educated men than that faced by less-educated women.
- **Although a growing share of Americans own their home, rates of homeownership among most racial and ethnic minorities lag far behind that of whites.** And homeownership has *declined* over the last 35 years for those in the lowest income quartile, in contrast to the modest increases seen among higher income groups. Barriers to opportunity for homeownership are exacerbated by persistent discrimination in mortgage lending and home sales.

DIMENSIONS OF OPPORTUNITY

We define opportunity as a fair chance to achieve one's full potential. A true "Opportunity Society" would uphold these core values:

Mobility. Everyone who works hard should be able to advance and participate fully in the nation's economic, political, and cultural life. Any poor child in America should be able to fulfill her or his full potential; economic status at birth should not pre-determine ultimate achievements or assets.

Equality. Access to the benefits, responsibilities, and burdens of our society should exist without discrimination or inequality based on race, gender, nationality, socioeconomic status, or other aspects of what we look like or where we come

from. Nor should favoritism, nepotism, or corruption work to shut out disfavored groups or perpetuate a privileged class.

Voice. We embrace democracy as a system that depends on the ability of all of us to participate in the public dialogue. The voting booth, the town square, the street corner, and the op-ed page remain important, and have been joined by broadcast and electronic media. This aspect of the American ideal provides not only freedom from censorship, but key opportunities to participate in our society's political, cultural, and intellectual life.

Redemption. Human beings are not fixed in their abilities or motivations; they evolve and develop based on available

- Following at least three decades of increases, concentrated poverty has declined since the 1990s. But poor female-headed and minority households are *increasingly* more likely than poor white households to live in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty.
- A record number of Americans—more than two million last year—are incarcerated in local jails or federal or state prisons. A growing number are people convicted of non-violent crimes. The rate of incarceration of women has increased more than twelvefold since 1970, and the disproportionate impact of incarceration on people of color has greatly escalated.

These are just some of the signs that the promise of the American Dream—the idea that anyone in this country can achieve his or her full life potential—is withering for millions of people.

Through bold leadership and innovative policies, the nation’s elected leaders can ensure the promise of opportunity in America. *The State of Opportunity in America* report encourages policy makers to:

- Regularly assess the impact of public policies on opportunity.
- Modernize safety net programs that help people meet their basic needs, starting with equitable and affordable health care for all Americans.
- Build Americans’ skills to adapt to a globalizing economy, evolving technology, and an increasingly diverse population.
- Renew a commitment to human rights in the United States by crafting a new generation of laws that address evolving forms of bias, exclusion, and deprivation.
- Prioritize crime prevention and rehabilitation over increased incarceration.
- Strengthen our democracy by better protecting voting rights and promoting political participation.

We hope that the report will be an additional resource for users of this toolkit to better understand, communicate, and solve the challenges to the issue of Opportunity in America.

options, incentives, and support. Current ability is not the same as future potential. People who falter in their efforts deserve a chance to get back on their feet; those who break societal rules warrant not just punishment, but also the opportunity for rehabilitation, redemption, and a second chance.

Community. We are part of a common national enterprise, linked in our successes and challenges, and responsible to each other as well as to ourselves. We value diversity as a strength, and strive to evolve with our changing population.

Security. No one should be denied access to a basic level of education, health, and economic well-being. Without this basic protection from exploitation, it is impossible to access the other rights and responsibilities that society has to offer.

These six dimensions of opportunity are drawn from the Executive Summary of The Opportunity Agenda’s The State of Opportunity in America report. To download a copy of the Executive Summary, visit:

www.opportunityagenda.org/executivesummary





A Tale of Two (Dueling) Frames

By Loren Siegel

The ideal of opportunity is central to the American story. Communications scholars refer to opportunity as a “level one frame”—a big idea, like freedom, justice, and responsibility—which represents universally shared values. From a communications perspective, opportunity is a strong and promising foundation upon which to build a social justice policy agenda. To the extent that social justice policies in housing, education, health care, immigration, or criminal justice, are tied to the value of opportunity, they will have a significant head start in winning support.

But there is a problem: “Opportunity” means different things to different people. When conservatives and progressives speak of opportunity, they are actually invoking different frames which logically lead to very different public policies. And although they are different and sometimes opposing, both frames resonate with the American public.

For conservatives, America is already a land of opportunity. One has merely to seize the opportunities that are there for the taking. In response to an NPR interviewer’s question about whether he thought we had a “level playing field” in higher education, Ward Connerly, leader of the anti-affirmative action movement, responded:

“The door is open. The important thing is to be prepared for admission, and that is something that if we don’t start now, urging kids to get themselves prepared and taking advantage of those opportunities, we’ll never get there.”

According to the conservative **Opportunity Frame**, anyone who works hard can climb the ladder of success and achieve the American Dream. Those who don’t succeed are undeserving for one reason or another. The conservative frame places the burden of seeking and accessing opportunity squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

For progressives, the U.S. as a “land of opportunity” is an aspiration but not yet a reality. Systemic obstacles including racism, sexism, and class prevent many Americans from achieving the American Dream. No matter how hard they try to succeed, too many fail through no fault of their own. Progressives often speak of the “lack of opportunity”—something conservatives barely acknowledge. The progressive **Opportunity Frame**, which assigns to the government a major responsibility for ensuring opportunity for all, regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity, was invoked by Senator Barack Obama in his keynote speech at the National Democratic Convention in 2004:

“People don’t expect government to solve all their problems. But they sense, deep in their bones, that with just a change in priorities, we can make sure that every child in America has a decent shot at life, and that the doors of opportunity remain open to all. They know we can do better. And they want that choice.”

How Does the Public Think About Opportunity?

A review of published public opinion research shows that both **Opportunity Frames** resonate with the American public. On the one hand, a 67 percent majority is “*satisfied* with the opportunity for a person in this nation to get ahead by working hard” (Gallup Poll: Mood of the Nation, 2005). On the other hand, most Americans acknowledge that equal justice is *not* yet a reality for African Americans and Latinos, and 50 percent of the public does *not* believe that “racial minorities in this country have equal job opportunities as whites” (Princeton Survey, 2003; Gallup Poll: Race Relations, 2003).

As to whether the government or the individual bears the primary responsibility for narrowing existing gaps in opportunity, Americans seem to want to have it both ways. On the one hand, 78 percent agree with the statement, “Everyone has it in their own power to succeed” (Pew Research Center, December 2004). Nevertheless, most Americans (57 percent) think the government should do more to help the needy (Pew Research Center, Trends 2005), and the same percentage thinks the government “should play a major role in fighting discrimination against women and minorities” (Hart-Teeter, 1999).

What's the Media Frame Today?

At The Opportunity Agenda's request, we looked at 100 news stories from late 2004 to early 2005 that invoked an **Opportunity Frame**. The stories came from the major national newspapers and news magazines, several influential regional newspapers, network television, National Public Radio, and the major newspapers in two "battleground" states: Florida and Ohio.

The scan covered the pre- and post-presidential election period, when both major parties were trying to hitch their wagon to the "opportunity" star. The Republican Party platform promoted "opportunity zones," and George Bush called the U.S. "the opportunity society" (which later morphed into "the ownership society"). John Kerry promised he would "widen the circle of opportunity for every American," and one of the major themes of the Democratic agenda for the 109th Congress was "Expanding Opportunity to All Americans."

We found that, in general, the mainstream media tends to reinforce the conservative frame, as much by omission as by commission. Because the press likes to run features about individuals who have achieved the American Dream against formidable odds (think Horatio Alger), the media's message is that even the most downtrodden individuals can find opportunity in America if they try hard enough. For example, the industrious, entrepreneurial immigrant is a favorite media subject, and we found quite a few articles based on this theme. The following quote from a *New York Times* story headlined "One Woman's Long Trek to Fifth Avenue Salon," on October 3, 2004, is typical:

"Like millions of other newcomers to the U.S., Ms. Zicu faced a harsh life and a long struggle out of poverty. But like thousands of immigrants before her, she fought her way to entrepreneurial success, ultimately opening her own day spa . . . Anyone with grit and a willingness to take risks, she says, can match her trajectory in what she considers to still be the **land of opportunity**."

From the sample of news stories generated by the scan, readers would get the impression that even people who have been incarcerated, among society's most marginalized members, have enough access to opportunity if they just look for it. One of several stories of this type was carried in the *Palm Beach Post* on October 31, 2004, and focused on a 52-year-old former Miami Dolphins lineman who was arrested in 1977 for selling cocaine and spent a year in prison:

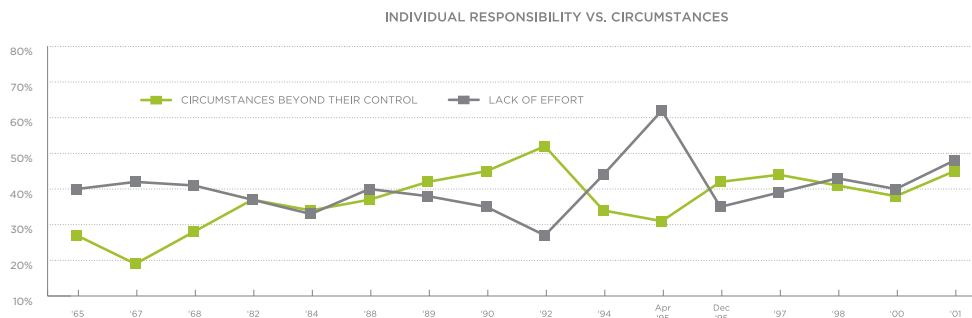
"That perspective Randy Crowder didn't have at 25. But experience has taught him that life is full of second chances. One only needs to know what to do with the **opportunities**. 'We all live and learn,' he said. 'We're all living and learning every day.'"

The progressive **Opportunity Frame**, which stresses institutional and public accountability, is less frequently invoked by the media. Sparse thematic and investigative coverage of social issues is consistent with what media analysts have observed for some time. Television news coverage, from which most Americans get their information about public affairs, almost always focuses on individuals' stories that never link to broader themes. Events are presented as a series of disconnected episodes in which systemic problems are neither identified nor explored. The dots are rarely connected. This has real consequences for the social change movement because, in the words of the FrameWorks Institute, "the more episodically social issues are framed, the less likely it is that citizens will hold government accountable for solving the problem."

Winning the Duel

For the past 40 years, public opinion researchers have been asking the following question: “In your opinion, which is generally more often to blame if a person is poor: lack of effort on their own part or circumstances beyond their control?” The response to this question is a strong indicator of which **Opportunity Frame**, conservative or progressive, is ascendant at any point in time. The chart below shows the dueling frames at work.

Individual Responsibility vs. Circumstances



(Gallup, 1965-1967, 1984, 1988-1990, National Opinion Research Center 1969, CBS/New York Times 1992, 1994-1995, 2000, Los Angeles Times 1992, Princeton Survey Research 1997, NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School 2001)

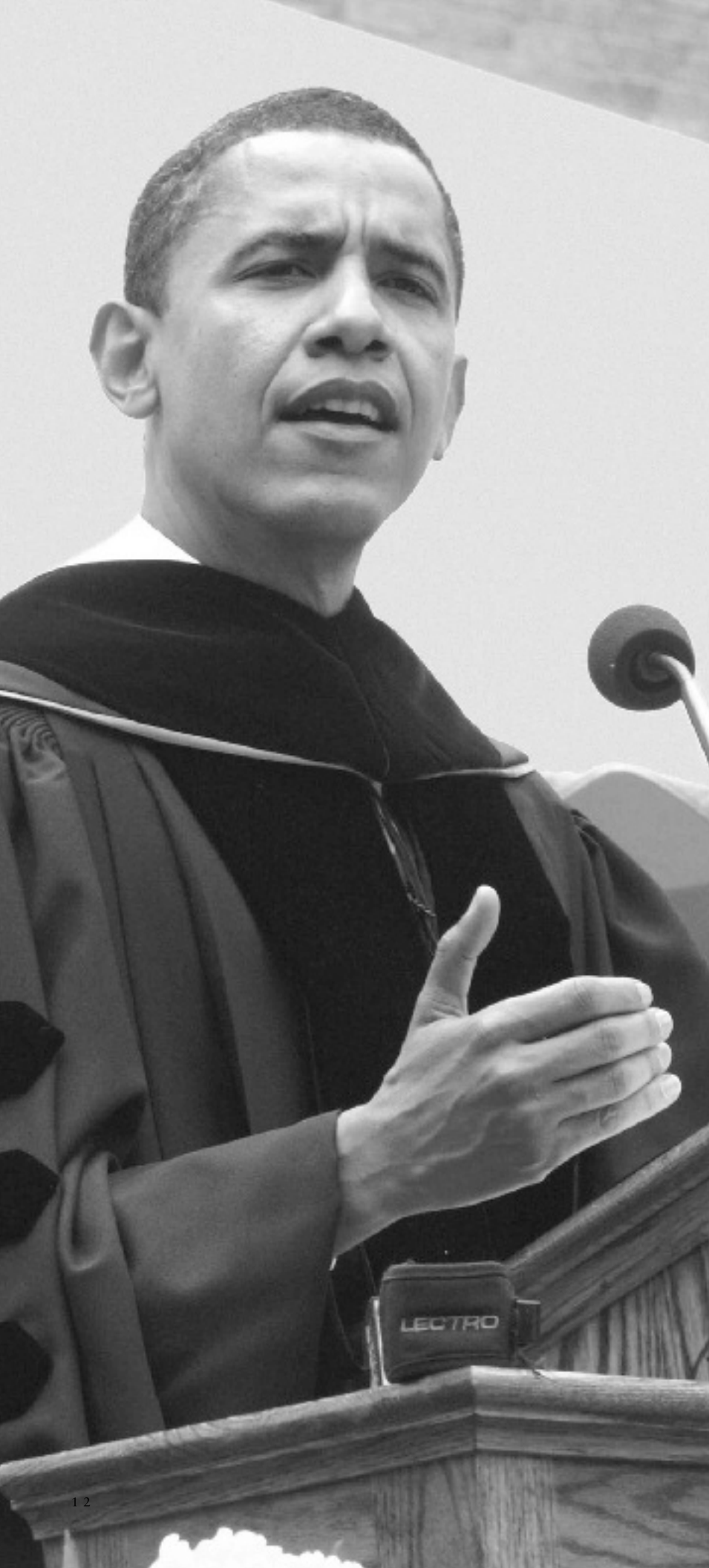
In 1988, the two frames were in a statistical dead heat, but in 1989 they began to diverge, and by 1992, twice as many Americans thought poverty was due to circumstances beyond individual control. What happened?

1992 was the year of the Bush-Clinton presidential election, when the mantra “it’s the economy, stupid” was in play. The country was in its deepest recession since the early 1980s, and there was heavy news coverage in all media of unemployment and other economic woes. Bill Clinton’s economic views, which emphasized systemic problems and government responsibility, were widely reported. The problems were framed as institutional, not individual, and the public responded.

But within a very short time, these trajectories changed places, and by 1995, twice as many Americans thought lack of individual effort was to blame for poverty. This was the era of Newt Gingrich’s Contract With America and the beginning of Republican control of both houses of Congress. Personal responsibility was at the top of the agenda, and media coverage shifted to individual stories of “welfare cheats” and “deadbeat dads.” This set the scene for the adoption of the historic welfare “reform” legislation, aptly named The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. But by 1998, the frames were running even again.

Strong strategic communications will be key to moving the American public more firmly in the direction of the progressive **Opportunity Frame**, and to supporting a wide range of progressive public policies that acknowledge and fulfill our society’s responsibility to ensure opportunity for all.

Loren Siegel is a consultant specializing in communications and strategic planning for social justice organizations. From 1991-2001 she served as Director of Public Education for the American Civil Liberties Union and built an integrated communications program for the organization and its state affiliates. Her client roster includes the New York Civil Liberties Union, The Opportunity Agenda, and the Ford Foundation. Ms. Siegel received her J.D. from Rutgers Law School.



Senator Obama's Commencement Address at Knox College

With his Keynote Address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Senator Barack Obama served notice that a powerful new voice had arrived on the American political scene. In that speech, he returned again and again to the theme of opportunity, to its continuing importance to the American Dream, and to sustaining "the audacity of hope." It is a theme he returned to again as the junior Senator from Illinois in a commencement address to the graduating seniors of Knox College on June 4, 2005.

In the excerpts from that speech, we show how Senator Obama uses the theme of opportunity to define what makes America unique, and to frame his vision for our society in terms that are inclusive, forward-looking, and hopeful. His interpretation of the Opportunity Frame is among the clearest yet articulated.

Rising Together

[Ask yourselves,] “What will be your place in history?”

In other eras, across distant lands, this question could be answered with relative ease and certainty. As a servant in Rome, you knew you’d spend your life forced to build somebody else’s empire. As a peasant in 11th-century China, you knew that no matter how hard you worked, the local warlord might come and take everything you had—and you also knew that famine might come knocking at the door. As a subject of King George, you knew that your freedom of worship and your freedom to speak and to build your own life would be ultimately limited by the throne.

And then America happened.

A place where destiny was not a destination, **1** but a journey to be shared and shaped and remade by people who had the gall, the temerity to believe that, against all odds, they could form “a more perfect union” on this new frontier. And as people around the world began to hear the tale of the lowly colonists who overthrew an empire for the sake of an idea, they started to come. Across oceans and the ages, they settled in Boston and Charleston, Chicago and St. Louis, Kalamazoo and Galesburg, to try and build their own American Dream. **2** This collective dream moved forward imperfectly—it was scarred by our treatment of native peoples, betrayed by slavery, clouded by the subjugation of women, shaken by war and depression. And yet, brick by brick, rail by rail, calloused hand by calloused hand, people kept dreaming, and building, and working, and marching, and petitioning their government, until they made America a land where the question of our place in history is not answered for us. It’s answered by us.

Have we failed at times? Absolutely. **3**

Will you occasionally fail when you embark on your own American journey? You surely will. But the test is not perfection. The true test of the American ideal is whether we’re able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them. Whether chance of birth or circumstance decides life’s big winners and losers, or whether we build a community where, at the very least, everyone has a chance to work hard, get ahead and reach their dreams.

We have faced this choice before. **4**

At the end of the Civil War, when farmers and their families began moving into the cities to work in the big factories that were sprouting up all across America, we had to decide: Do we do nothing and allow captains of industry and robber barons to run roughshod over the economy and workers by competing to see who can pay the lowest wages at the worst working conditions? Or do we try to make the system work by setting up basic rules for the market, instituting the first public schools, busting up monopolies, letting workers organize into unions?

1 The Senator begins his speech by reminding his audience of how radical the founding vision of America was: “a place where destiny was not a destination, but a journey to be shared and shaped and remade” by the people themselves.

2 He connects the founding principles of the nation to the aspirations of generations of immigrants, and goes on to connect the work of building “the American Dream” of economic prosperity (“rail by rail, calloused hand by calloused hand”) with the quest for the equality and inclusiveness of “a more perfect union” (“by marching, and petitioning their government”). The result, an America where “the question of our place in history” is defined by each of us, is at the core of our American understanding of “opportunity.”

3 Here, Senator Obama reminds his audience that the promise of America must constantly be renewed. It is not failure that threatens us as a society, but whether we can continue to build a society where success is based on hard work and merit, not “chance of birth or circumstance.” His realistic goal is not a perfect society, but one where basic fairness allows everyone to “work hard, get ahead and reach their dreams.”

4 Senator Obama again returns to examples from American history, pointing to

We chose to act, and we rose together. . . .

When World War II required the most massive homefront mobilization in history and we needed every single American to lend a hand, we had to decide: Do we listen to skeptics who told us it wasn't possible to produce that many tanks and planes? Or, did we build Roosevelt's Arsenal for Democracy and grow our economy even further by providing our returning heroes with a chance to go to college and own their own home?

Again, we chose to act, and again, we rose together. . . .

Like so much of the American story, once again, we face a choice. Once again, there are those who believe that there isn't much we can do about this as a nation. That the best idea is to give everyone one big refund on their government—divvy it up by individual portions, in the form of tax breaks, hand it out, and encourage everyone to use their share to go buy their own health care, their own retirement plan, their own child care, their own education and so on.

In Washington, they call this the Ownership Society. ⁵ But in our past there has been another term for it—Social Darwinism—every man or woman for him or herself. It's a tempting idea, because it doesn't require much thought or ingenuity. It allows us to say that those whose health care or tuition may rise faster than they can afford: "tough luck." It allows us to say to the Maytag workers who have lost their job: "life isn't fair." It lets us say to the child who was born into poverty: "pull yourself up by your bootstraps." And it is especially tempting because each of us believes we will always be the winner in life's lottery, that we're the one who will be the next Donald Trump, or at least we won't be the chump to whom Donald Trump says: "You're fired!"

But there is a problem. It won't work. It ignores our history. It ignores the fact that it's been government research and investment that made the railways possible and the internet possible. It's been the creation of a massive middle class, through decent wages and benefits and public schools that allowed us all to prosper. Our economic independence depended on individual initiative. It depended on a belief in the free market; but it has also depended on our sense of mutual regard for each other, the idea that everybody has a stake in the country, that we're all in it together and everybody's got a shot at opportunity. That's what's produced our unrivaled political stability. . . .

some of the most difficult periods in our history to show how, in those moments when our nation was threatened, we survived, and thrived, by placing the interests of the community above those of the individual: "We chose to act, and we rose together."

⁵ Here the Senator directly addresses the Right's understanding of opportunity: "the Ownership Society." Rather than simply accept this "Social Darwinism," however, he explains how this frame runs counter to American history and ignores the role government has played in the creation of shared prosperity and equal opportunity. While the average American's belief that "we'll always be the winner in life's lottery" is a powerful one, he reminds his audience that "we're all in it together and everybody's got a shot at opportunity." This is the heart of his argument, and his vision for the country: that while "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" is a good talking point, ultimately it is "our sense of mutual regard for each other" that is our greatest strength and the surest way to ensure our continued prosperity.

So let's dream. Instead of doing nothing or simply defending 20th-century solutions, let's imagine together what we could do to give every American a fighting chance in the 21st century.

What if we prepared every child in America with the education and skills they need to compete in the new economy? **6**

If we made sure that college was affordable for everyone who wanted to go? If we walked up to those Maytag workers and we said, "Your old job is not coming back, but a new job will be there because we're going to seriously retrain you and there's life-long education that's waiting for you. . . ."

What if no matter where you worked or how many times you switched jobs, you had health care and a pension that stayed with you always, so you all had the flexibility to move to a better job or start a new business? What if, instead of cutting budgets for research and development and science, we fueled the genius and the innovation that will lead to the new jobs and new industries of the future?

It won't be easy, but it can be done. It can be our future. We have the talent and the resources and brainpower. But now we need the political will. We need a national commitment.

And we need each of you. **7**

My hope for all of you is that as you leave here today, you decide to keep these principles alive in your own life and in the life of this country. You will be tested. You won't always succeed. But know that you have it within your power to try. That generations who have come before you faced these same fears and uncertainties in their own time. And that through our collective labor, and through God's providence and our willingness to shoulder each other's burdens, America will continue on its precious journey towards that distant horizon, and a better day.

6 Having presented his understanding of American history, and confronted the opposing "every man or woman for him or herself" frame, the Senator connects the theme of opportunity to specific policies: educational opportunities to allow every American to compete in the "new economy," health care for all, and increased funding for the basic research to support "the genius and the innovation" that will allow America to continue to thrive into the future.

7 The Senator concludes with a call to action: acknowledging the difficult work that lies ahead if we are to face the challenge of ensuring opportunity for all, he reminds his audience that America has "faced these same fears and uncertainties" before, and come through them. Today, through our "willingness to shoulder each other's burdens, America will continue on its precious," though never completed, journey toward "a better day."

"So let's Dream.

Instead of doing nothing or simply defending 20th-century solutions, let's imagine together what we could do to give every American a fighting chance in the 21st century."

—Sen. Barack Obama

Framing Opportunity in Action

This part of the toolkit contains practical tools for incorporating the **Opportunity Frame** into your work, whether you are communicating in one-on-one settings or through mass media. Here you'll find:

- Strategic considerations for presenting the **Opportunity Frame** to key audiences.
- Talking points for bringing the **Opportunity Frame** to your audiences.
- Some thoughts on framing at the intersection of race and opportunity from Makani Themba-Nixon, Executive Director of the Praxis Project.
- Template Op-Eds and press releases that leverage the **Opportunity Frame**.
- Spokesperson skills and how to choose the right spokespersons.
- Examples of effective **Opportunity Frame** spokespersons.
- Creating and capitalizing on media opportunities.
- Additional resources for communicating the **Opportunity Frame**.

Part



Opportunity in Your Backyard



Strategic Considerations for Using the Opportunity Frame with Target Audiences

Communications is not all about bright lights and television cameras. Some of the most important communicating we do happens on a one-on-one basis: meetings with policy makers, canvassing our neighbors, or in conversations with friends or colleagues. Wherever you find your audience, these tips can help you leverage the **Opportunity Frame** to make the case for your issue.

When you do choose to leverage media as a campaign tool, it is helpful to have other stakeholders in your issue understand and echo your frame. The **Opportunity Frame** is designed to be echoed.

The Frame's strategic strength is that it makes a broad swath of progressive issues more appealing to many of the target audiences whose support is most needed: policy makers, business leaders, constituents, faith-based organizations, and journalists. Read on to see general considerations for presenting your issue to important strategic audiences and potential partners. How you present your vision of opportunity to these target audiences will affect how they portray your issue, and the **Opportunity Frame**, in their own communications.

The Media

*How does the **Opportunity Frame** increase your media impact overall?*

Since the **Opportunity Frame** draws on broadly held American values, representing story ideas in terms of the Frame makes it easier for reporters and editors to portray your stories sympathetically. Often, reporters inaccurately portray a controversial issue as having two equal sides. A familiar example is the insistence that global warming articles prominently feature scientists on “both sides of the debate,” even though there is no real debate on the issue among serious scientists. When you talk about your issue in terms of opportunity, journalists are less likely to feel that they’re being approached by a special interest group with a marginal agenda. Instead, they know they have a chance to tell the story of reasonable people defending a popular vision of the American Dream. This is exactly the kind of story journalists want to tell.

Also, since the **Opportunity Frame** is embraceable by so many different people, it lends itself to “echo,” one of the most powerful forces in the world of media. The Frame lends itself to representatives as diverse as Wall Street investors, union organizers, farmers, senators, welfare recipients, and local politicians. This means it will show up in media outlets ranging from community newsletters to major national newspapers and cable news. Echo will be achieved when all of these different people simultaneously use different forums to talk about the same notion of opportunity. This, in turn, makes you more credible when you use the **Opportunity Frame** to discuss your issue.

“Journalists will serve the public well if they examine new measurements and expressions of opportunity in America, explore its democratic dimensions and, through vigorous reporting, nourish compassion for those unfairly denied its benefits.”

—Steve Montiel, Founding Director of USC Annenberg’s Institute for Justice and Journalism

Policy Makers

Why should they talk about your issue in terms of opportunity?

Solid polling research supports what they already know: Americans feel strongly that our country should be a land of opportunity. This means building access to opportunity and eliminating barriers to opportunity for their constituents. It’s also clear that widespread opportunity makes a nation stronger, and more productive. If policy makers can make people aware of barriers to opportunity and then champion opportunity, they’ll be able to gain political strength while improving lives and strengthening the country, the state, or the city.

Your Constituents

Why is the Opportunity Frame appealing to them?

It activates people. Most people believe strongly that everyone should have access to opportunity. When they look at their lives through the **Opportunity Frame** and realize the ways in which they or others around them are denied opportunity, they will act to defend their rights.

And since the Frame helps people talk about their issues in less controversial ways, it makes it easier for them to talk about an issue with family, friends, and the media.

Businesses and Business Associations

What’s in it for them?

Protecting opportunity leads to a better business environment: one with a stronger economy, a better-educated workforce, and less crime.

Supporting opportunity will benefit businesses with overwhelmingly positive publicity. It’s similar to helping children’s hospitals—just about everyone thinks it’s deeply important. Finding common language to speak about your issues with business groups can lead to powerful new allies for your organization.

This is a chance to be a moral leader, something that is still important for many business leaders.

Faith Organizations

What does faith teach about opportunity?

The **Opportunity Frame** is a natural fit here: its themes of redemption and community dovetail perfectly with mainstream religious beliefs. Upholding opportunity can and should be portrayed as a moral issue.

The **Opportunity Frame** themes of “voice” and “equality” also fit naturally with many progressive faith-based organizations. In many cases, such as with Southern churches active in civil rights struggles, these themes are already deeply ingrained in their work.

Opportunity Frame Talking Points

Below we have included suggestions of how to talk about opportunity with some of your most important audiences. As with any message guidelines, these ideas will work better as you insert your organization's personality and tailor them to your target audiences. Before you use these or any messages, test them by soliciting feedback from a sampling of your audiences.

Policy Makers (Responsibility Message)

- **Opportunity is a promise America makes to all who live here.** It defines who we are as a nation. As our nation's leaders, you have a special responsibility to expand opportunity for all Americans.
- **We aren't keeping that promise.** A growing number of people encounter barriers to opportunity that cannot be overcome through hard work or perseverance alone. In many instances, it isn't just one barrier people face, but many.
- Removing society-wide barriers to opportunity and shoring up the cornerstones of opportunity are vital to maintaining our **strength as a nation**.
- **Craft and vote for policies** that offer and expand opportunity for all Americans.

Policy Makers (Stronger Nation Message)

- **We are a stronger nation**—as well as a more prosperous one—when we expand opportunity for all in America.
- By making expanding opportunity a **top national priority**, we give America its best chance to be more secure at home and competitive abroad.
- Yet, our policies and actions in many places have led to **stagnant or declining opportunity** for many people.
- **Advocate for and personally advance policies** that shore up the cornerstones of opportunity in America—such as strong, equitable public education, access to health care, and equitable pay.

Your Constituents

- **The promise of opportunity is at the very core of what America stands for**, yet years of backward policies mean many Americans are systematically denied opportunity. We consider these policies to be barriers to opportunity.
- **Hard work alone cannot overcome these barriers.**
- America can only be a land of opportunity when it commits to **eliminating the barriers to opportunity** that face too many of the people who live here.
- Join us as we **call on our elected leaders** to craft, vote for, and speak out on behalf of policies that reclaim and expand opportunity.

Businesses and Business Associations

- **Opportunity is a core American value** and the heart of our nation's success and productivity.
- When opportunity erodes for more and more Americans, so does **America's ability to maintain its competitive edge**, moral leadership, and economic strength.
- **The maintenance of our economic health**, both domestically and internationally, will depend on active commitment—from private and public sectors—to solidify and strengthen the cornerstones of opportunity.
- Develop and advocate for business practices and policies that **enhance opportunity, dignity, and productivity** within America's workplaces and communities.

Faith Organizations

- Opportunity is one of our most treasured values—a promise America makes to all who live here and that defines who we are as a people. We must join together to become **custodians of that promise**.
- While we worry as a nation about budget deficits, we fail to give due attention to **our empathy deficit**. Too often we turn a blind eye to the fact that opportunity is stagnant or diminished for increasing numbers of Americans and their families.
- **Through collective will**, we have the ability to improve opportunity for families in America and ensure a bright future for all in our care.
- An important part of opportunity is a **shared responsibility to each other as neighbors, Americans, and human beings**. That value is fading in our nation, and we need to renew it.
- Join us in advocating for policy makers, business leaders, and other national leaders to **each fulfill their moral obligation** to maintain opportunity for all.

Template Communications Pieces

The Op-Ed

Op-Eds are your chance to speak through the news media directly to policy makers, your constituents, and other target audiences. In the example below, The Opportunity Agenda's Executive Director, Alan Jenkins, applies the **Opportunity Frame** to the rebuilding of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Will the New New Orleans Be America's Symbol of the Land of Opportunity?

Years from now, visitors to New Orleans will witness a city that our nation has rebuilt together from the ground up—the first major city built in the 21st century. The decisions that we make in the coming months will determine whether New Orleans reflects the best values of a true land of opportunity or merely new islands of opportunity surrounded by a sea of old troubles.

As the horrific reality of the Gulf Coast disaster comes into sharper focus, people around the country are asking why those left behind in the evacuation of New Orleans were so overwhelmingly poor and so overwhelmingly black. Addressing that question is essential to ensuring that the rebuilding process lives up to our country's highest ideals.

True opportunity in America means equal treatment, economic security and mobility, a voice in decisions that affect us and, when we need it, a chance to start over. It also means that we are responsible for each other, as well as for ourselves; we are in it together, not competitors or free agents.

Opportunity was denied New Orleans' low-income black communities long before Hurricane Katrina came to call. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, New Orleans became a racially and economically segregated city—Plessy vs. Ferguson, the 1896 Supreme Court ruling that approved segregation under the Constitution, was a New Orleans case. Discrimination continued long into the 20th century, in education, jobs, housing, and other walks of life.

The city's continuing legacy of inequality plays out in ways that proved devastating in this disaster. According to the 2000 Census, 28 percent of the people of New Orleans lived in poverty and 84 percent of those poor people are black. Low-income black families often had to settle for cheaper, low-lying housing, putting them directly in harm's way. Over 50,000 New Orleans households did not have a car, and many residents did not have the money even to pay for a bus out of town. Indeed, a 2002 report in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* predicted that 100,000 residents who didn't have transportation would be stranded by a big storm. Thus, announcing an evacuation order to rich and poor, black and white, was a far cry from a truly *equal* opportunity to leave the city quickly and safely.

As the government moves from rescue and evacuation to rebuilding the lives and communities of the survivors, how can we make sure that the pattern of unequal opportunity that contributed to this tragedy does not define the reconstruction as well?

Strong Lead.

Op-Eds need to grab a reader's attention quickly, so make sure your first paragraph is a strong one. Here, Alan Jenkins highlights how decisions we make today will determine what kind of city New Orleans will be in the future, and what those decisions say about our commitment as a nation to ensuring opportunity for all.

Concise Writing.

Op-Eds are generally 500-900 words long. Use short sentences and paragraphs to get your point across.

Frame the Issue Quickly.

Within the first three paragraphs, Jenkins explains the importance of decisions made today about rebuilding the city, what the aftermath of the hurricane says about our commitment to protecting the weakest among us, and presents the **Opportunity Frame** in easily accessible and compelling language.

Communicate Your Message.

Clearly state the main message of your Op-Ed early in the piece. Here, the main message is that the rebuilding process needs to be informed by policies based on real opportunity to avoid another disaster of this magnitude in the future.

Keep to the Point.

Having established the lessons he believes we should take from the storm and its aftermath, Jenkins immediately outlines the specific steps that need to be taken to ensure that the rebuilding effort is guided by principles of opportunity in which Americans believe deeply.

Conclude with Your Message.

End the piece by reiterating your key message. Here, Jenkins reminds his audience that “True opportunity, however, is not just the absence of discrimination, but the presence of fairness and respect for the vast potential of all human beings.”

Pitch It!

Pitch your Op-Ed to the Opinion or Editorial Page editor at your target newspaper. Call first to gauge their interest level, then fax or e-mail the Op-Ed with a cover letter, and follow up to make sure they received it. Don't submit the Op-Ed to another outlet unless your first target decides not to run it. If at first you don't succeed, consider other outlets or re-writing the piece.

Public officials should consider three straightforward measures:

First, government officials should develop a comprehensive *Opportunity Plan* for the rebuilding process that expands opportunity for all people in the region. It must ensure that poor people and people of color have equal access to safe, clean, affordable housing accessible by roads, and public transportation to good jobs, quality schools, safe daycare, and nutritious food stores. It must create incentives for economically integrated neighborhoods and ensure that environmental protections are respected in all communities. It must ensure that the training, employment, and contracting opportunities arising from the rebuilding process are shared by qualified women and men across racial groups, with care to include those who have historically been excluded. And it must ensure that all residents have a meaningful voice in the process that is not drowned out by monied special interests.

Second, in distributing funds for clean-up, rebuilding, and relocation, agencies should require *Opportunity Impact Statements* explaining how a proposed project will expand opportunity along specific dimensions. Who will benefit, and who will be burdened, by a proposed highway, bus line, or light rail system? How will hospitals be rebuilt and equipped based on actual community health needs, including the 37,000 former residents who speak a language other than English in the home? How will a construction contract offer employment and subcontracting opportunities to women and men of diverse backgrounds? Experience shows that, unless we constantly ask and answer these questions, old patterns of exclusion will quickly reappear.

Finally, we must continually measure our progress. *Opportunity Mapping* is an innovative process that demonstrates different communities' access to opportunity. Developed by Professor John Powell of Ohio State University, these maps overlay information on housing markets, employment markets, school performance, and other steppingstones to opportunity with information on the economic, racial, and other demographic characteristics of neighborhoods. The visual maps that result provide a remarkable illustration of the pathways and barriers to opportunity facing different communities.

These tools are no substitute for the billions of dollars, moral leadership, and human compassion that will be needed to rebuild this vital part of our country. Nor do they replace civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, and other human characteristics. True opportunity, however, is not just the absence of discrimination, but the presence of fairness and respect for the vast potential of all human beings. In rebuilding New Orleans, we have the chance to fulfill that fundamentally American promise, in practice as well as in principle.

Alan Jenkins is Executive Director of The Opportunity Agenda, a communications, research, and advocacy organization with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity for all Americans.

The News Release



The Opportunity Agenda
www.OpportunityAgenda.org

EMBARGOED FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2006

CONTACT: Diana Nikkah

212-334-5977

info@opportunityagenda.org

New Report Finds Opportunity in America on the Decline

New Organization Calls on National Leaders to

Take Bold Action to Restore the American Dream

February 7, 2006, WASHINGTON—A week after President Bush delivered his State of the Union Address, a new organization, The Opportunity Agenda, launched today with the release of its *State of Opportunity in America* report, the first national study to measure opportunity in America across a range of indicators. The report finds that Americans are facing sharply increasing barriers to opportunity, despite their best efforts to achieve the American Dream. It analyzes trends in housing, employment, education, health care, and incarceration—across race, gender, income, and immigration status. The report calls on national leaders to take specific steps to expand opportunity for all Americans.

“The report’s most disturbing finding is that a growing number of Americans are facing not one barrier to opportunity, but multiple barriers that cannot be overcome through hard work alone,” said Bill Lann Lee, The Opportunity Agenda’s Chairman and a former Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. “If America is to be a true land of opportunity, we have a responsibility to turn these trends around.”

The report’s findings include:

Despite some positive gains, opportunity is at risk for tens of millions of Americans.

- Increasing Inequality at Work: Wage inequality is now greater than it was three decades ago. Wages increased less than 1% in adjusted dollars between 1979 and 2003 for those in the bottom 10% of wage-earners, but increased by 27% among the top wage-earning 10% during the same period.
- Health at Risk: The number of uninsured Americans—more than 45 million in the most recent U.S. Census estimate—has reached a record high.
- America, Incarcerated: A record number of Americans—more than 2 million last year—were incarcerated in prisons and jails, and the rate of incarceration of women has increased more than twelve-fold since 1970.

Organizational Logo and Web Address.

This should appear at the top of all releases. Organizational letterhead is often appropriate for this.

Headline and Sub-Head.

This is critical, since busy reporters usually spend 30 seconds or less scanning a press release. Catch attention, but do not wither your credibility with histrionic language. A good story doesn’t need to rely on inflammatory rhetoric to attract interest. Framing begins with the headline, here simply by using the word Opportunity.

Lead Paragraph.

This is the most important paragraph in the body. It grabs attention and frames the issue for maximum media impact. A good news release should follow the “inverted triangle” model, where the biggest, most important idea hits the reader at the top, and narrower details are filled in later in the piece.

Lead Quote.

Within the first 2-3 paragraphs, there should be a compelling quote that frames the issue and clarifies your most important news. The identity of the speaker is often as important as what they say.

Inverted Triangle.

After your lead, begin to fill in the story’s details.

Readability.

The goal of your writing should be for the reader to comprehend your information as quickly as possible, not to impress them with sophisticated prose. Use short sentences.

Many millions of Americans are facing multiple barriers to opportunity.

American women, people of color, immigrants, and low-income people face multiple obstacles:

- Many Women Falling Behind: Women still earn only 81 cents for every dollar that men earn. And women with *higher* levels of education currently face a *larger* wage gap than they did 30 years ago.
- Discrimination Still a Problem: Research shows that discrimination against women and people of color persists in employment, housing, lending, and other gateways to opportunity, diminishing the life chances of millions of Americans.

Bold action by our government is needed to expand opportunity for all.

The report urges policy makers to:

- Assess the impact of public policies on opportunity—including by requiring an Opportunity Impact Statement for publicly funded projects.
- Help Americans build their skills to adapt to a global economy, evolving technology, and an increasingly diverse population.
- Modernize safety net programs that help people meet their basic needs and become economically secure.

Supporting Quotes.

Continue to frame by building your cast of characters. A few extra perspectives from different people can entirely recast a story.

Indicate the End.

Type “###” to indicate the release is over. If your page is more than one page, be sure to include page numbers, and write “more” at the page breaks.

Boilerplate.

Don’t assume reporters know about your organization. At the end of your release, briefly describe your organization and direct reporters to your website for more information.

“Opportunity is a promise that America makes to everyone who lives here,” said Alan Jenkins, Executive Director of The Opportunity Agenda. “It defines who we are as a nation. Our country’s leaders have a special responsibility to expand opportunity for all Americans, and they can do that through specific, proven policies.”

The Opportunity Agenda hopes to engage people across the country in discussions about opportunity. “True opportunity is rooted in core American values: equal treatment, economic security and mobility, a voice in decisions that affect us, a chance to start over after misfortune or missteps, and a sense of shared responsibility towards each other,” said Phoebe Eng, The Opportunity Agenda’s Creative Director. The report’s findings and recommendations correspond to those six values, measuring how America fares in terms of equality, security, mobility, voice, redemption, and community.

###

A project of the Tides Center, The Opportunity Agenda’s mission is to build the national will to expand opportunity in America. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, and to read the The State of Opportunity in America report, go to www.opportunityagenda.org. This interactive website is a resource for people concerned about opportunity values, challenges, and solutions, including journalists, advocates, and lawmakers.



Disrupting the Discourse: Framing at the Intersection of Racism and Opportunity

By Makani Themba-Nixon

Talking effectively about social justice issues, from crime to public school funding to welfare and more, must include talking effectively about race. Racial justice is essential to real opportunity, and race is a dominant, though implicit, theme in the conservative framing that progressives must address.



If progressives remain silent about race, they not only concede the race frame to the right: They concede all of the issues that conservatives successfully racialize. And the list of those issues is long. The fight over affirmative action, for example, invoked centuries-old notions of who is capable and deserving and who is not. When President Reagan introduced America to the welfare queen, we certainly got the picture in living color. And what's the main rationale the right uses for public budget cuts? So *those* people won't waste your hard earned money.

The right frames nearly everything in a neat "us" and "them" and, more often than not, the dividing line is the color line. And they have centuries of stereotypes on their side. Their frames are like an old song that's hard not to hum once the music starts. Winning hearts and minds on a wide range of social justice issues requires that we disrupt these centuries of programming with a few old songs of our own.

Disrupting the dominant frames on race, deservingness, and competency means focusing on two main questions: *Why* are things the way they are? And *how* can they be different?

The opposition's frame of blaming social problems on the pathology of individuals will only lead toward policies that punish people. Our job as progressives is to expose *patterns and systems of injustice* in ways that help people understand the structural roots of these issues and shift blame away from victims.

Books Not Bars Put Racism Up Front and Wins

Books Not Bars is a coalition housed at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights that fights for radical changes in the juvenile justice system. There was no avoiding race in this work as media coverage of juvenile justice issues became little more than framing youth of color as "super predators" devoid of humanity and beyond rehabilitation. The Oakland, California- based project started with research and training from the Youth Media Council, which did an extensive content analysis of coverage and suggested messaging that attacked racist coverage directly. In addition, Books Not Bars did research on funding, corporate ties, and other information that helped it develop a landscape analysis of the issue.

Developing a landscape analysis means looking at the political and institutional context of an issue. Among the questions every advocate should ask: **Who benefits from unfair policies? Who is harmed? Who has power? Who is left out?** For Books Not Bars, the answers led them to a campaign that moved the public conversation from support for building more detention facilities to support for halting construction on what was to be one of the largest juvenile detention facilities in the nation. There are a number of important lessons in their success.

Take time to document patterns of unfairness and identify practical solutions.

Research is key in developing a landscape analysis to gather the necessary evidence of unfairness as well as practical "how" steps for change. Smart research and framing helped Books Not Bars remind the public of what was really at stake: opportunity for thousands of young people who deserved much better.

Avoid the easy trap of telling individual, “episodic” stories to advance the issue.

Although sympathetic characters and moving stories make for gripping entertainment, they don’t do much to advance policy agendas over the long haul. Books Not Bars put together a range of spokespeople from youth to academics that helped convey root causes without sacrificing news value. When choosing messaging and spokespersons, make sure that they will help illustrate your “why” and take your target audiences to your “how” things should change.

Don’t reinforce the opposition’s frame or their power. Sometimes we get so caught up in trying to convince our opposition that we forget the importance of building power for change among those most affected. Resources spent to convince the opposition in their own language more often solidify their power, make their institutions richer, and only add weight to their frame. Books Not Bars reached out to youth and ethnic media to ensure that its media work supported its organizing efforts. The coalition invested efforts in building voice and power among those most affected in order to expand its base of active support for the campaign while building for future initiatives. After all, a majority is not built by focusing on the opposition. It is built by expanding the base of supporters, starting at the core and working progressively outward.

Do reinforce people’s dream of something better. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, James Scott examines over one thousand years of rebellion among the oppressed. His research asserts the existence of what he describes as the “hidden transcript.” This “transcript” unfolds in barbershops and at kitchen tables and it is encoded in youth popular culture as hip hop music and graffiti. People are more likely to act when a potent hidden transcript is unveiled and their hopes and concerns are validated in a way they recognize. The public emergence of the term “Driving While Black” is a potent example. Talk about how racist treatment by the police is pervasive in African American communities, whether from the pulpit, in the school yard, or on a rap record. When the term Driving While Black was “unveiled,” it helped to validate a community’s reality that was mostly hidden from the mainstream.

Of course, communication is not a panacea. It is a tool to be used in concert with many others, but one we cannot afford to ignore. We need to monitor coverage of the issues and never hesitate to write or call outlets when coverage is missing key voices, shows bias, or is poorly done. We have to develop and nurture an infrastructure for media—data, sources, and studies that document the problems and their root causes, and other resources that help shift the lens back from old stereotypes and victim blaming and illustrate the “landscape” stories we must tell.

Makani Themba-Nixon is Executive Director of the Praxis Project, a media and policy advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. Visit www.thepraxisproject.org. Some of this essay was adapted from her contribution to Talking the Walk: Communications Guide for Racial Justice by Hunter Cutting and Makani Themba-Nixon, AK Press 2005.

Faces of Opportunity

The Opportunity Agenda has produced a series of videos, available on its website (<http://www.opportunityagenda.org>) showcasing real Americans talking about opportunity, and what it means to them. Here are just a few of The Opportunity Agenda's Faces of Opportunity. We encourage you to visit the website to gain a better understanding of who best conveys the values of opportunity for your community, both in what they say and in who they are.



Dr. Janet Taylor

Dr. Janet Taylor is the Director of the Anger Management Program at Harlem Hospital in New York City. She was inspired to enter medicine by the examples of her father and grandfather.

"I was born in Chicago, and always wanted to go to medical school, I think primarily because my father was a pharmacist, and his father had gone to pharmacy school in the '30s at the University of Iowa and had to drop out because of money. . . . What we don't understand as a nation and as a world is if you're better, I'm better. We're always saying, 'I have to be above you. Despite what we may not have monetarily, we always have the opportunity to give to other people.'"

Dr. Taylor's story touches on at least two core opportunity values. First, it exemplifies mobility, or the idea that everyone who works hard should be able to advance and participate fully in the nation's economic, political, and cultural life. Second, community: the idea that we are part of a common national enterprise, linked in our successes and challenges, and responsible to each other as well as to ourselves. We value diversity as a strength, and strive to evolve with our changing population.



Al Camacho

Al Camacho was born in New York City, the child of Puerto Rican immigrants. A former addict who succeeded in turning his life around, he now works to help the homeless who come through the Bowery Mission seeking to make a better life for themselves.

"Here at the Barrio Mission they call me the Father of Compassion because when some guy does wrong, right away people want to tell him, 'You gotta leave,' and I'll say, 'No, give him an opportunity again. Don't throw him out, don't give up so quick on him.' These doors are open to the homeless 24/7. I don't care who you are, where you came from—you can make it, in life—you just got to be around the right people."

Al Camacho speaks to the value of redemption, one of the key dimensions of opportunity. People aren't perfect, and when they make mistakes, a just and compassionate society gives them a second chance to succeed.



Brian Anderson

Brian Anderson is the owner of City View Contracting and Management, Co. in Long Island, New York.

"I've talked to many clients on the phone. As soon as I meet them they're shocked. Some people, they don't trust you just because you're black. Many get past it because they want the best job they can get and some people, they just stop you cold—'Somehow or other he'll mess it up before it's over.'"

Mr. Anderson reminds us that discrimination, whether based on race or other characteristics, remains a potent force in our society. The need to continue striving for real equality and a deeper commitment toward creating a truly inclusive community are central to protecting and expanding opportunity for all.



Choosing the Faces of Opportunity

When you choose spokespersons to communicate the **Opportunity Frame**, consider that they don't just speak a message—they also visually symbolize your frame and values. The messenger's identity is often just as important as the message—in some cases, a spokesperson personifies an issue. As a result, a campaign's cast of spokespersons should be diverse in terms of race, gender, class, and other respects. The best spokesperson candidates are those with potential to attract and command media attention, present a poised, confident, and persuasive image, and stay on message no matter what is happening around them or what questions come at them. Once you've picked diverse and talented spokesperson candidates, devote time and other resources to refining their skills—you'll find them to be among your campaign's top assets.

A few words of caution:

Spokespersons who tell personal stories about problems in their lives are often blamed by audiences for their problems. Communications consultant Doug Gould, after analyzing peoples' reactions to various messages about poverty, concluded, "When people hear personal, emotional stories about the working poor, they see the personal flaws of the individual that may have contributed to the problem. 'If he didn't take drugs, or quit school, have a teenage mom, etc., he wouldn't be poor.'"

According to extensive opinion research carried out by Gould, advocates can't rely on audiences' sympathy. Instead, frames based on "responsible planning and economic values," reinforced with ideas about "teamwork and respect" will be most successful. This means choosing spokespeople not based only on their potential to make audiences feel sympathy, but also based on their ability to speak in terms of these larger frames. If you do choose to have a spokesperson tell their "hard times" story, be sure that they bring it around to a discussion of the broader institutional accountability for their problems so that audiences do not focus on their personal imperfections.

The most senior people are not always the best spokespersons. In many organizations, the executive director and key staff are responsible for being spokespersons. This is not always the best choice. Choose your spokespersons based on how appealing to and effective with media they are, not based on their seniority.

Make your spokespeople easy to contact. Reporters, rushing against deadlines, often do not have time to call a dozen different people looking for quotes. They tend to go with the designated spokesperson pitched to them. It is important to identify key spokespersons and make those individuals as available as possible to reporters. We suggest giving key reporters the home and cell phone numbers, as well as email addresses, of your top spokespersons.

There are three kinds of spokespersons you might designate, based on the goals of your efforts:

1. Organizational Spokespersons.

These spokespersons officially represent your group—they typically include your executive director, key program staff, or board members. These spokespersons should be comfortable speaking to the media and have a command of your organization's messages and the issues you work on. They need to be able to provide reliable, accurate, and timely information to reporters—or know where to get it. Reporters may call these people at any time for a quote or background information. Make sure members of the media know how and where to find these folks, including personal contact information, if possible.

2. Community Spokespersons.

It is important to diversify your list of spokespersons so the same one or two people are not always being quoted. This helps to ensure that the voice of people directly affected by the issue are included in the media. Moreover, be mindful of all the kinds of diversity—racial, age, sexual orientation, class, nationality, gender, and otherwise—that make up the rich texture of your communities, and whether those people are being groomed for the media. We encourage community spokespersons to speak at press conferences, rallies, and other public events, write opinion-editorials or appear on talk shows. Community spokespersons represent "real people." Their dramatic personal stories

can be tremendously persuasive. Remember, do not always present community spokespersons with the intention of provoking sympathy. Choose members of the affected community who can speak with authority, who audiences will easily respect, and who can powerfully present the issue in terms of institutions and broad themes, not just in terms of isolated negative personal impacts.

3. Other Voices.

People not typically associated with your campaign can often validate your position with new audiences. They can also broaden the frame. For example, if you run a civic engagement project, consider inviting a local affordable and/or environmentally friendly housing contractor to serve as an available spokesperson. She or he might make the case that, if more low-income people participated in elections, there would be more affordable or green housing developments, which would benefit the economy and environment in the community. These “outside the box” spokespersons expand your frame and legitimize your campaign to new audiences. They also serve as insurance against audiences’ tendency to blame victims when they hear sad stories from a community.

Once you have identified your spokespersons, follow the instructions below in the section on “Speaking for Opportunity” to train them to stick to the message. The more practice your spokespersons get, the better they become.

Speaking for Opportunity

Can you articulate how your issue is about dissolving barriers to opportunity and opening up opportunity, in ten seconds? Ten seconds may not sound like much, but it’s plenty of time to say something powerful if you know what you want to say. Here are some sample sound bites. Try crafting your own.

Sample:

“When we ask for (X policy), we’re just trying to ensure that our country really is a land of opportunity and a good place to do business.”

“We just want to live in a place where people are treated equally, where everyone has a voice in decisions that affect them, and where we all have a chance to succeed.”

Capturing News Coverage: Creating Newsworthiness with Media Events and Photo Opportunities

We all know our issues deserve front-page, prime-time coverage since they are so compelling and urgent. Unfortunately, many editors and producers do not agree. In communicating the **Opportunity Frame**, it is up to you to highlight stories and create events that both tell your story and that media outlets will consider newsworthy enough to cover. Media, especially television, are much more likely to broadcast your message if you can represent it visually. This can be a lot of fun—it's a chance to stretch your imagination.

But a good visual is not the whole recipe. In order to draw cameras and microphones to your issue, you need to add as many newsworthy facets, or hooks, as possible. Common hooks are:

- **Calendar hooks:** When your issue directly ties to a publicly recognized holiday, the season, an event in history, etc. In promoting the **Opportunity Frame**, consider using Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday or the opening of the new school year as calendar hooks.
- **Celebrity:** When your celebrity spokesperson speaks on your behalf or when a celebrity does something relevant to your issue. An Opportunity celebrity spokesperson might be someone who achieved success in the corporate or media world through a scholarship to college, or someone who overcame drug addiction because they were allowed to enter a drug treatment program rather than being incarcerated.
- **New Announcement/Report:** News is called “news” because it's new. If you have new information or can announce an unprecedented achievement, your chances of coverage rise.
- **Events:** When your organization hosts an event related to your issue. The Opportunity Agenda's *State of Opportunity in America* report represents an unprecedented examination of opportunity in our country today. You might consider holding a town hall meeting discussing the local implications of data from the report—you can visit the “Get Involved” section of The Opportunity Agenda's website to learn how to coordinate a “meet-up” discussion in your community.



Opportunity News Hooks

January

Lunar New Year (*Chinese, Korean and several other Asian cultures, date varies*).

- 1: 1863 Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation
- 2: 1945 Executive Order 9066 rescinded ending Japanese internment
- 2: 1991 Sharon Pratt Dixon is sworn in as the first African American woman to serve as mayor of a major city, Washington D.C.
- 3: 1957 Dalip Singh Saund begins service as America's first Asian Congressman
- 6: 1941 FDR delivers the "Four Freedoms" speech
- 8: 1867 Congress grants all adult male citizens in D.C. the right to vote
- 11: 1944 FDR delivers "The Economic Bill of Rights" speech
- 12: 1932 Hattie Ophelia Wyatt Caraway becomes first elected female Senator
- 15: 1929 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is born
- 16: Martin Luther King Day **Holiday**
- 17: 1996 Barbara Jordan dies (2006, 10 year anniversary)
- 21- Feb 21 (date varies): Vietnamese New Year (Tet)
- 22: 1973 Supreme Court legalizes abortion in *Roe v. Wade* decision
- 23: 1849 Elizabeth Blackwell becomes the first woman in the U.S. to receive a medical degree
- 23: 1997 Madeleine Albright is sworn in as America's first female secretary of state
- 25: 1890 The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) is founded

February

Black History Month

American Heart Month

Canned Food Month

- 5: 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act enacted
- 10: 1989 Ron Brown elected the first African American chairman of the Democratic Party National Committee
- 12: Lincoln's Birthday **Holiday**
- 19: 1942 FDR signs Evacuation Order 9066 resulting in the round-up of 120,000

Americans of Japanese heritage to one of ten internment camps—officially called "relocation centers"—in California, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas

- 21: 1936 Barbara Jordan is born
- 21: 1965 Malcolm X is assassinated
- 25: 1870 Hiram Rhoades Revels is sworn into the U.S. Senate, becoming the first African-American to sit in Congress
- 27: 1922 The Supreme Court declares the 19th Amendment constitutional
- 29: 1940 Hattie McDaniels is the first African American actor to win an Oscar
- 29: 1968 Kerner Commission Report released

March

National Women's History Month

Social Workers Month

- 2: 1807 Congress abolishes the African slave trade
- 3: 1991 Police brutality against Rodney G. King caught on tape (2006, 15 year anniversary)
- 5: 1914 The Ford Motor Company doubles the daily wage
- 6: 1857 Supreme Court rules in Dred Scott case
- 8: International Women's Day
- 9: 1841 Supreme Court rules on Amistad mutiny
- 9: 1990 Dr. Antonia Novello is appointed the first female and first Hispanic Surgeon General
- 12: 1933 First "fireside chat" by FDR
- 12: 1993 Janet Reno sworn in as the first female attorney general
- 21: 1965 Selma to Montgomery March begins
- 22: 1974 Equal Rights Amendment passed by Congress
- 22: 1988 Congress passes the Civil Rights Restoration Act
- 25: 1911 147 workers die in a fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company
- 30: 1870 15th Amendment adopted
- 31: 1927 Cesar Chavez is born

April

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

- 2: 1917 Jeannette Pickering Rankin, the first female elected to Congress, takes her seat
- 4: 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated
- 5: 1992 Abortion rights advocates march on Washington
- 8: 1935 Works Progress Administration (WPA) established by Congress
- 11: 1968 Fair Housing Act enacted
- 23: 1993 Cesar Chavez dies
- 26: 2006 Administrative Professionals Day **Holiday**
- 29: 1854 First African American college chartered

May

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

National Blood Pressure Month

Older Americans Month

- 5: Cinco de Mayo **Holiday**
- 8: 1973 AIM occupation of Wounded Knee ends
- 9: 1960 FDA approves the birth-control pill
- 14: 2006 Mother's Day **Holiday**
- 17: 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling made
- 18: 1896 Supreme Court rules in *Plessy v. Ferguson*
- 20: 1996 Supreme Court defends rights of homosexuals, *Romer v. Evans* (2006, 10 year anniversary)

June

Gay Pride Month

Filipino Week: Second full week in June

- 2: 1924 The Indian Citizenship Act passed
- 15: 1877 First African American graduates from West Point
- 16: 1963 First woman enters space
- 19: Juneteenth **Holiday**
- 22: 1944 FDR signs the G.I. Bill of Rights
- 23: 1972 Nixon signs Title IX into law

- 25: 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act passed
- 28: 1969 The Stonewall Riot
- 29: 1972 Supreme Court strikes down death penalty, *Furman v. Georgia*

July

- 2: 1964 Johnson signs Civil Rights Act
- 4: Independence Day **Holiday**
- 4: 1776 Declaration of Independence Ratified
- 5: 1865 Salvation Army founded
- 5: 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) enacted
- 6: 1976 Women accepted into U.S. Naval Academy for first time
- 7: 1976 Female cadets enrolled at West Point for first time
- 7: 1981 President Reagan nominates Sandra Day O'Connor to be the first female Supreme Court justice (2006, **25 year anniversary**)
- 9: 1947 Florence Blanchfield becomes the first female army officer to hold a permanent military rank
- 12: 1976 Barbara Jordan delivers keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention, becoming the first African American and the first woman to do so
- 19: 1848 The first Women's Rights convention begins in Seneca Falls
- 26: 1990 The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is enacted
- 28: 1868 14th Amendment adopted
- 28: 1868 Burlingame Treaty signed between U.S. and China

August

- 6: 1965 Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law
- 11: 1965 Watts Riot begins
- 14: 1935 FDR signs the Social Security Act
- 18: 1920 Women's Suffrage Amendment ratified
- 18: 1963 James Meredith, the first African American to attend the University of Mississippi, graduates
- 26: 1920 19th Amendment adopted
- 28: 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his "I have a dream" speech
- 28: 1983 The first African American, Guion F. Bluford, enters space

- 29: 1989 Ileana Ros-Lehtinen becomes the first Hispanic woman and the first Cuban American elected to Congress

September

- 4: 1957 Arkansas troops prevent desegregation
- 5: 1877 Crazy Horse killed
- 4: 2006 Labor Day **Holiday**
- 8: 1965 The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) begins the Delano Grape Boycott
- 10: 2006 Grandparents Day **Holiday**
- 12: 1974 Violence erupts in Boston over racial busing
- 13: 1994 Clinton signs the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)
- 15: 1963 Four African American schoolgirls killed in Birmingham
- 15: Sept. 15-Oct. 15 Hispanic Heritage Month
- 21: 1989 Colin Powell becomes first African American Joint Chiefs' chairman
- 22: 2006 Native American Day **Holiday**
- 25: 1789 Bill of Rights passes Congress
- 26: Indigenous Peoples' Day
- 25: 1981 O'Connor takes seat on Supreme Court (2006, **25 year anniversary**)
- 30: 1962 Riots over desegregation of Ole Miss
- 30: 1962 The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) founding convention is held. The NFWA is later renamed the United Farmer Workers (UFW).

October

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Filipino American History Month

- 1: International Day for the Elderly
- 2: 1967 Thurgood Marshall, the first black justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, is sworn in
- 3: 1995 O.J. Simpson acquitted
- 9: 2006 Columbus Day **Holiday**
- 14: 1964 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wins Nobel Peace Prize
- 14: 1975 A homosexual sergeant, Leonard Matlovich, challenges the Air Force

- 18: 1587 Filipinos first land in Morro Bay, California

- 28: 2006 Make a Difference Day

- 27: 1994 U.S. prison population exceeds one million

November

National Adoption Awareness Month

Diwali Holiday (date varies).

Indian Festival of Lights

- 2: 1983 MLK federal holiday declared
- 7: 1989 David Dinkins is elected New York City's first African American mayor and Lieutenant Governor
- Douglas Wilder becomes the first elected African American state governor
- 11: Veterans Day **Holiday**
- 20: Universal Children's Day
- 30: 1993 Toni Morrison becomes the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature

December

- 1: 1955 Rosa Parks begins bus boycott
- 1: World AIDS Day
- 6: 1927 Patsy Takemoto Mink's birthday. Mink was the first woman of color to serve in Congress.
- 10: Human Rights Day
- 10: 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted
- 10: 2006 International Children's Day
- 15: 1791 Bill of Rights becomes law
- 17: 1944 U.S. approves end to internment of Japanese Americans
- 18: 1865 Slavery abolished in America
- 18: 1944 The Supreme Court decides the landmark cases of *Korematsu v. United States* which allowed the forced eviction of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans from their homes, and *Ex parte Endo*, which forbids the continued incarceration of loyal American citizens.
- 22: 1984 Bernhard Goetz subway shooting
- 24: 1865 Ku Klux Klan founded
- 26: First day of Kwanzaa **Holiday**

Opportunity Story and Event Ideas

- Use local graduations or back-to-school as a hook. For example, hold an event or release a report that discusses the opportunities available to this year's incoming kindergarten class. What barriers to opportunity are faced by the graduating high school class?
- Localize the story. Create an "Opportunity Update" detailing the state of opportunity in your community, or use the *State of Opportunity in America* report in pitching your local media outlets on an opportunity-related story.
- The concept of mobility offers many visual opportunities. Photos and events that highlight people buying a first house (possibly after being handed "the keys to opportunity") or graduating from college are one way to do this. You might also work to expand the definition of opportunity by using images to convey the idea that "we're all working together to expand opportunity for everyone." You might hold a ribbon cutting for an affordable housing development, or get your organization to hold an Opportunity Day where you raise funds to support a scholarship to a local school. Ideas like these work well for business or home and garden reporters—remember to pitch to reporters from different sections of the newspaper.
- Use Election Days as hooks.
- Use the voting booth to symbolize civic participation or brainstorm more creative ways to visually represent who votes and who participates civically in other ways in the community.
- Use calendar hooks. What holidays are not usually associated with opportunity but could be? Thanksgiving, for example, is a chance to be thankful for all of the opportunities people have and to be mindful of barriers to opportunity in their communities.
- Tying your issue to blockbuster movies will often help guarantee coverage. For example, *Harry Potter* could be seen as an allegory about opportunity: why do only a couple hundred kids get to go to the exclusive Hogwarts Academy? What potential Harry Potters are out there who couldn't go to Hogwarts?
- Leverage local celebrities. What opportunities did they have to help them succeed?
- Leverage other local icons. Does your community have a Carnegie library? These institutions, built by a rags-to-riches tycoon to strengthen communities, embody the Opportunity concepts of community and mobility.

Media Event Checklist

- News defined?
- Audience targeted?
- Messages honed?
- Spokespersons trained?
- Speakers confirmed?
- Time and date researched and conflict-free?
- Location confirmed?
- Media advisory sent to reporters?
- Deliverables produced (i.e., press kit, reports, videos, etc.)?
- Logistics team in place for event (i.e., reporter wranglers)?
- Decorations/visual props ready?
- Pitch calls to reporters made?
- Dress rehearsal for speakers?
- AV equipment confirmed and tested?
- Refreshments confirmed?

At the Event:

- "Bull pen" media area roped off?
- Press kits stuffed and ready to be handed out?
- Signage posted?
- Media check-in sheet put out?
- Check-in desk staffed at all times?
- Reporters greeted and checked in as they arrive?
- Props and decorations in place?
- Speakers all arrived?
- First speaker starts on time (within five minutes of posted start time)?
- Q&A period time allotted?
- Follow-up spin after Q&A?
- Follow-up work completed?
- No-show press contacted and filled-in?

Press Conferences vs. Media Events

Media events are different from boring press conferences. The latter is routine, scripted, and often held indoors. The former thrives on drama, color, spontaneity, and surprise. Media events offer more visuals for cameras and are a more interesting way for reporters to spend part of what would otherwise be a dull workday.

In planning the event, consider the following:

- What is your news? What is the ten-second sound bite you want to see on the evening news after your event? What is the headline you want to see after your event?
- Is there other, potentially competing, news being made on the day of your event? Will reporters be available on your slotted date/time?
- Does your location help ensure success? Is it visually interesting for cameras? Is the location or photo opportunity too visually crowded for a picture that communicates?
- Do you have a well-rounded, compelling roster of spokespersons? Do they agree with the message? Are they trained as spokespersons?
- Do you know who your audience is? What media outlets will reach that audience?
- Have you put together creative visual opportunities?

Part

Promising Practices



Lessons Learned: Promising Practices from the Field

In creating this toolkit, we sought to offer concrete, practical advice on how to apply the **Opportunity Frame** and its core themes in everyday advocacy work happening in communities across the country. What better way to illustrate how to apply the recommendations in this toolkit than to look to the field for success stories from organizations already working with key elements of the **Opportunity Frame**?

While most of the efforts described in this section were launched before the **Opportunity Frame** was fully developed, many of the advocates profiled nonetheless incorporated important elements of the frame into their work. It's not just a coincidence—many community leaders are already using aspects of the **Opportunity Frame** in their work because it's a universally appealing narrative that we all understand on some level.

From the stories (and victories) here, we can learn valuable, practical lessons on how to be successful by incorporating the **Opportunity Frame** into future and ongoing advocacy work. These stories illustrate how the **Opportunity Frame** works for criminal justice reform in New York, reproductive rights in California, and in challenging the FCC's media ownership rules.

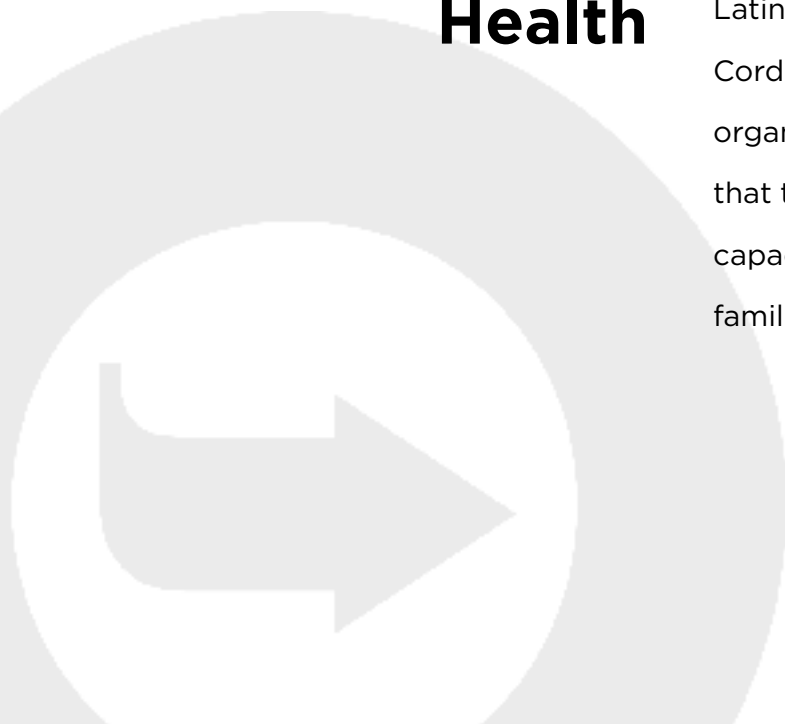
One of the greatest virtues of the **Opportunity Frame** is that it can be used across movements to link issues and interests, and it appeals to diverse constituencies across the nation. By echoing a common **Opportunity Frame**, we can help people to connect the dots between various issues, and to see the interconnectedness of various communities of interest. A common **Opportunity Frame** helps to create a steady drumbeat for positive change, no matter what issue you're working on or what community you live in.



Reframing Reproductive Justice

California Latinas for Reproductive Health

Founded in 2003, California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) is a statewide, Latina-led advocacy organization whose mission is to advance California Latinas' reproductive health and rights within a social justice and human rights framework. "We want to ensure that California policy is reflective of the priority needs of Latinas, their families and their communities," says Rocio Cordoba, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the organization. CLRJ promotes Latinas' health and ensures that they are empowered with the information and policy capacity to advocate on behalf of themselves, their families, and their communities.



“Opportunity is a positive, proactive path toward a healthy and fulfilling life that also contributes to our society and civic life: To promote the fulfillment and the ability of our communities to thrive, and not be impeded by present obstacles, including systemic denials of opportunity that impede access to health care and education.”

—Rocio Cordoba, Co-Founder and Executive Director of California Latinas for Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Health and the Opportunity Frame

From the beginning, California Latinas for Reproductive Justice had a primary goal of reframing the debate on the issues. “From day one, we knew we had to expand the terms of the conversation,” says Cordoba. “We’ve always believed that we needed a broader framework than just abortion and contraception. We believe that we need to discuss reproductive rights in the context of advancing the overall health and opportunities within our communities. It also has to be about freedom from violence, access to education, —and all of the things that make healthy communities possible in the first place.”

Rooted in the organization’s philosophy is the tenet that Latinas’ health disparities overall—and reproductive health access in particular—cannot be viewed in isolation. Rather, these issues must be assessed and addressed in light of other priorities that affect Latinas’ overall health and well-being—including their rights to self-determination and opportunities in all aspects of their lives and those of their families. Latinas’ economic security; access to equal educational opportunities; and freedom from discrimination, violence, and environmental hazards in their communities, educational institutions, and work places have a profound effect on Latinas’ abilities to make informed choices about their health and future lives.

In their core philosophy and in their messaging, CLRJ calls upon one of the key dimensions of the **Opportunity Frame**: security. It is the American ideal that regardless of race, class, or gender, no one should be denied a basic level of health, education, or economic well-being. It is only through the protections offered by these basic securities that Latinas—and all people—can fully participate in society, availing themselves of their rights and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in society.

Statewide Challenge

When Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger called the special statewide election of November 2005, three wealthy activists seized on California’s ballot initiative process to advance their anti-reproductive rights agenda. They were clear that their goal was to outlaw all abortions, and their initiative—dubbed “The Parents’ Right to Know and Child Protection Initiative,”—would have provided an incremental step toward that end by amending California’s constitution to prohibit abortion for a minor until 48 hours after a physician notified the girls’ parent/guardian. Proposition 73, as the proposal was titled on the state ballot, would have mandated reporting requirements and authorized monetary damages against physicians for violations.

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice joined with a number of allied organizations to form the Campaign for Teen Safety—a broad-based coalition of doctors, nurses, health care providers, educators, civil rights, and women’s groups, including the League of Women Voters. The coalition launched an aggressive campaign to defeat the initiative, including a statewide grassroots voter education effort, and a media campaign that ran paid ads in key California media markets.

Framing

“Minors’ access is the toughest reproductive health issue to frame, and not necessarily what we would have wanted to lead with for our first campaign,” says Cordoba. The campaign chose to focus and frame its efforts around the security of youth that would be directly affected by the measure, hence the core message: “Keep Teens Safe—Vote No on Prop 73.” Research indicated this message had wide appeal with a range of California voters, and that it could be tailored to meet the interests of various communities and constituencies.

“We endorsed and echoed that campaign message, because we felt it would resonate with the realities in our communities—young Latinas don’t need any more blockades to health care,” says Cordoba, citing dire statistics that point to a major gap in health care:

- Nearly one-third of Latina women in California are uninsured, representing 56 percent of the state’s uninsured women.
- California’s Latinas have among the lowest rates of breast cancer screening, diagnosis, and treatment, and are more likely than White women to die from the disease.
- The incidence of cervical cancer in Latinas age 30 and older is almost twice the incidence in other racial and ethnic groups of women the same age.

By highlighting how the disparities in health care adversely affected the security of Latinas, CLRJ also addressed another core dimension of the **Opportunity Frame**: equality. In its focus on the evidence of health disparities facing Latinas, CLRJ called upon the basic American value of fairness, which demands that we all share equal access to the benefits and responsibilities of our society. Equality means that American opportunity and prosperity—and a healthy life—should be available to all of us, regardless of who we are or where we come from. CLRJ used hard evidence, as well as moral arguments, to show the unequal treatment that Proposition 73 would impose.

Given CLRJ’s constituency and its unique role in the Campaign for Teen Safety, its members also felt the campaign frame had to be more comprehensive in order to engage a Latina audience. “For us, this wasn’t just an issue of teen pregnancy prevention,” says Cordoba. “It’s also about opportunity for teens—socioeconomic status, educational attainment. The factors behind teen pregnancy are much broader than teen behavior, so we want to put the issue in that broader context. It’s really a question of opportunity—are we giving young people the opportunity to be healthy, to achieve their own goals in life? We need to provide young people medically accurate information, as well as access to services and support that gives them the opportunity to make well-informed decisions and to live a fulfilling, healthy life.”

Framing

Reaching Latino Voters

CLRJ played an especially important role in helping the campaign reach Latino voters. Along with several coalition partners, CLRJ offered a series of voter education workshops on Proposition 73, helping Latino voters understand the impacts of the measure on their communities and concerns. One of CLRJ's roles in the coalition was to translate the coalition's key messages into language that would resonate with Latinos in the state, and to explain why the coalition's concerns were relevant to Latino communities.

CLRJ also tailored the campaign's message and worked to get the word out to community groups and ethnic media. The statewide campaign knew that Los Angeles County in particular could play a decisive role in the outcome of the election, so CLRJ focused deeply on Spanish-language media in Los Angeles. Newspapers *La Opinion* and *Hoy* both covered the campaign, as did television outlets like *Telemundo* and *Univision*. All carried the message that Proposition 73 was dangerous for young Latinas. *La Opinion* even ran an editorial opposing the measure.

"The positive response of Spanish-language media is one of the best qualitative measures of CLRJ's successful role in the campaign," says Cordoba.

The Win... And Beyond

On Tuesday, November 8, 2005, Californians voted to defeat Proposition 73, by a margin of 53 percent to 47 percent. Now that CLRJ and its allies have won this defensive battle, they are ready to go on the offense, and have plans to launch an effort to secure unbiased, comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate reproductive health and sexuality rights education for youth. According to Cordoba, "Comprehensive sex education is another opportunity for education, and for us to help teens with the tools to make their own opportunities in life."



Redemption Song

The Real Reform New York Coalition

Redemption is the idea that human beings are responsive and evolving beings, and that those whose falter in their efforts or break societal rules warrant the chance of rehabilitation and a new beginning. Redemption is a second chance at opportunity, but for the millions of Americans with criminal records, redemption, and the opportunity it would give them, are far from reach. The discrimination that many ex-felons face at the voting booth and in searching for viable employment and housing are just a few of the obstacles standing in the way of real opportunity. The number of incarcerated Americans has risen shockingly: More than 2.1 million people are now incarcerated in the United States—a rate of imprisonment far higher than that of any other nation, and unprecedented in U.S. history.



“Opportunity in our campaign has meant creating an opportunity to push our values, affect change, and open people’s hearts to the value of redemption.”

—Tony Newman, Drug Policy Alliance, member of Real Reform New York Coalition

New York State’s 1973 Rockefeller Drug Laws and the copycat legislation they spawned, impose severe sentences—up to life imprisonment—on even low-level drug users. This choice to criminalize drug addiction instead of treating it as a health issue began an era of mass-incarceration for people convicted of nonviolent drug offenses. Harsh drug laws also have had a disproportionate racial impact: The rate of incarceration of African American and Hispanic people convicted of drug offenses has far outpaced that of whites, despite the fact that drug use is no higher among people of color.

A Coalition Focused on Redemption

The Real Reform New York Coalition was founded in 2004 to advocate for the replacement of the Rockefeller Drug Laws with cost-effective, just, and community-based alternatives to incarceration. The coalition is made up of dozens of organizations representing thousands of community members, activists, advocates, policy and drug treatment experts, Rockefeller Drug Law survivors, and their friends and families.

Real Reform New York defines “real reform” as:

- Reducing sentences to levels proportionate to those for other nonviolent crimes and to bring New York into line with national standards.
- Restoring judicial discretion so judges can fashion just sentences based on consideration of the particular case, and when appropriate, sentence people convicted of low-level drug offenses to community-based treatment.
- Delivering retroactive sentencing relief to currently incarcerated Rockefeller inmates serving unjustly long sentences.
- Expanding drug treatment programs and other alternatives to incarceration for people convicted of low-level drug offenses.

Without real reform most people convicted of drug offenses will never have a chance to build on the other parallel principles of opportunity such as mobility, equality, and having a voice to participate in society’s political life.

Real Reform is Possible

The Real Reform New York Coalition has demonstrated that by bringing together policy makers, religious leaders, family members, and celebrities, legislators can be persuaded to institute reform. In December 2004, New York Governor Pataki signed a bill that allowed 446 people serving over 15 years to life on certain felonies to petition for release after serving eight years. Recently, the Coalition has won reforms that build on last year's change by allowing people serving seven years to life on other felony convictions to petition for release after serving three years.

The Real Reform Coalition continues to sway public opinion by stressing alternatives to incarceration as a more redemptive criminal justice policy.

While advocates and family members are encouraged by the small reforms, they are clear that the latest reforms don't impact the majority of people behind bars. Yet these small gains offer a chance for continued dialogue on the importance of redemption, community, and equality as core opportunity values,

Rockefeller Drug Laws Are Racially Discriminatory and Destroy Communities

The Real Reform Coalition has shown that the Rockefeller Laws have been racially discriminatory and inhumane: Although levels of drug use are relatively consistent across racial and ethnic lines, 93 percent of the people sentenced by the Rockefeller Laws come from the African American and Latino communities. International groups such as Human Rights Watch have condemned this horrendous disparity, and the campaign was careful to document the discriminatory application and effects of these provisions.

Real opportunity is hampered for the thousands of families of these incarcerated individuals—those laws have broken apart families and destabilized communities. So the work of Real Reform invokes another core principle of the **Opportunity Frame—community**—we are responsible to each other and cannot turn our backs on members of our most vulnerable communities. Communities need support for rehabilitation programs and re-entry programs that support individuals and their families.

The Public Supports Redemptive Policies

Nearly 16,000 people are incarcerated for drug offenses in New York State prisons, representing nearly 38 percent of the prison population and costing New Yorkers over half a billion dollars each year. In recent polls, over 83 percent of New York residents said they think the Rockefeller Drug Laws should be repealed. This reflects an increase in support, across demographic groups nationally, for rehabilitative policies (especially drug and mental health treatment) and opposition to vindictive incarceration policies.

This shift in public opinion is most evident in the recent highly publicized races for District Attorney in two New York districts where two incumbents were defeated in part due to their support for the Rockefeller Drug Laws.



Defending Diverse Voices in the Media

The Media Diversity Coalition

Community advocates, more than many people, understand the media's powerful influence on public opinion. After all, having a voice that counts in the public dialogue is an important part of having real opportunity in a democracy.

Holding the FCC Accountable

Research has shown that diverse voices and local community perspectives diminish on the airwaves when large media companies merge. When a company's headquarters are in New York City, for example, the needs of local communities it serves in McAllen, Texas or Boise, Idaho, are often unmet.

Yet the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the body charged with ensuring that our media system operates "in the public interest," has frequently failed to protect America's diverse voices. In May 2003, the FCC voted to overturn rules preventing cross-ownership of print, broadcast outlets, and multiple television stations, in a single media market. The FCC also voted to allow broadcast networks to own stations with a collective reach of 45 percent of U.S. households, a significant increase over the previous limit of 35 percent. Jeff Perlstein of Media Alliance, an organization that promotes excellence, ethics, diversity, and accountability in the media, describes the FCC's actions as, "another tidal wave of media consolidation, allowing the six companies who control 80 percent of what Americans see and hear to get even bigger."



In response, Media Alliance and other media advocacy organizations including Reclaim the Media, Youth Media Council, Media Tank, and the Center for Digital Democracy formed a broad alliance, the Media Diversity Coalition. The Coalition made clear the connection between seemingly arcane media policy issues and local communities' real needs for a public voice to ensure opportunity. The Coalition held a series of 12 public hearings around the country, forcing the FCC's behavior into the public limelight. According to Perlstein, "the capacity-crowd hearings demonstrated deep public concern and surfaced resonant personal stories, questions, and solutions that often go invisible in federal policy debates."

Linking with national organizations and Washington, D.C. allies helped amplify their messages and push a bi-partisan core of Congressional supporters to heed their constituents' concerns, as well as leading to 2 million public comments—an unprecedented response to proposed rule changes. Large membership organizations like Common Cause, MoveOn.org, and even the National Rifle Association and the Parents' Television Council weighed in against the FCC's actions. As a result of this effort, the FCC's attempt to permit greater media consolidation was defeated.

Media Alliance continues its fight to protect the public voice. Working with campaign leaders the Youth Media Council, they have filed four legal challenges to Clear Channel stations in the San Francisco Bay Area, driven by the documented concerns of more than 2100 community members.

United Under the Opportunity Frame

Though media advocates did not set out to use an "Opportunity Frame" as such, they invoked its principles of voice, community, and equality. Smart framing was coupled with smart organizing, effective messaging, and hard work. Activating deep-seated values helped the coalition to build strong support that transcended traditional political divisions. See the sidebar, "Opportunity and the Media," for a description of how advocates involved with FCC policy use elements of the Opportunity Frame.

"Opportunity is having a voice and the power to make sure that policy is responsive to that voice."

—Jeff Perlstein, Executive Director,
Media Alliance

"We cannot allow too much consolidation to tune out voices heard across this country and in each of our communities."

—FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein

"I'm concerned that the richness of the San Francisco Bay Area, its diversity of communities, cultures, and points of view be represented in the media. Can this important role be left to a handful of distant media conglomerates?"

—Professor Dorothy Kidd, Department of
Media Studies, University of San Francisco

OPPORTUNITY AND THE MEDIA

Consider the media through the following dimensions of opportunity, and look to the “Voice” chapter in *The State of Opportunity in America* report for recommendations on expanding opportunity through reforming the way we create and distribute media.

Voice:

In an Opportunity Society

Media amplifies diverse voices and gives local communities a door into the public dialogue. Media ensures that most all perspectives are heard on issues, and that these perspectives are given adequate time to explain themselves. A wide range of people create and access media that reflects their experiences, communities tell their stories in the media, and their stories have impact on public policy and civic dialogue.

Currently

Mainstream media does not present diverse voices. Seldom are more than two sides of a story presented. An official story is usually the focus of the piece, and is only gently questioned. Individuals, and even many grassroots organizations, lack the strategic communications capacity needed to break their stories into mainstream media. It is very difficult for average people to create their own media, and many do not have access to the internet, a powerful force in democratic communication. *The State of Opportunity* report’s “Voice” section details barriers to opportunity posed by the current lack of diversity in media ownership.

Community:

In an Opportunity Society

Media builds community by telling local stories through a diversity of local perspectives and in ways that show our shared connections. Locally based media companies provide good jobs to communities across the country. Community members are able to offer feedback and shape the content of their media, disagreeing with coverage, calling out stereotypes, and commending exceptional stories. Media helps teach us about each other, building common understanding.

Currently

Media companies’ consolidation results in local newsrooms shrinking. Communities lose good jobs, and they do not see their perspectives represented or stories told in media. In the worst cases, remotely controlled media fails to alert communities in disasters. For example, after a December 2002 chemical spill in Minot, North Dakota, none of Clear Channel’s six local radio stations had live staff when the police tried to get the stations to broadcast an alert about toxic gases descending on the community. Three hundred community members were hospitalized.

Equality:

In an Opportunity Society

Media presents the perspectives and experiences of women, men, and youth of all races, sexual orientations, economic classes, and nationalities, and

newsroom staffs represent the diversity of the communities they cover. While embodying equality in its practices, media builds equality in the communities it serves. All people have equal access to production and consumption of media. Small media business owners of all races have a fair shot at making a living.

Currently

Media does not give equal treatment to all. Women and people of color are grossly underrepresented among reporters, editors, and producers. News coverage tends to cater toward higher economic classes. Coverage tends to portray youth and people of color negatively, and many groups of people are simply ignored. Lower economic classes and people of color are often denied media access, especially internet access, by service providers and public infrastructure decisions. Most people do not have access to media production tools. This “digital divide” is a clear barrier to opportunity that begs for a resolution. Finally, as media conglomerates near monopoly status, small media businesses are choked off.

Conclusion and Resources

We hope this communications toolkit has provided you with some useful tools to begin using the **Opportunity Frame** in your work. We strongly believe that including messages about protecting and expanding opportunity in your communications about your issue will allow you to connect with new audiences, forge new alliances, and create positive social change.

The Opportunity Agenda's website (www.opportunityagenda.org) contains research, reports, and personal stories to help you better understand how to incorporate the **Opportunity Frame** into your work.

For more information on strategic communications, the SPIN Project's website (www.spinproject.org) contains free tutorials, articles, links, and other resources to help you in your communications work.

This Toolkit Continues Online

In addition to electronic versions of all of the pieces in this toolkit, you can find additional essays on the **Opportunity Frame** at www.opportunityagenda.org/toolkit, including an essay from Susan Strong of the Metaphor Project on "Talking Opportunity in America," and an essay from Lori Villarosa of the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity on "Talking About Race."

Join the Conversation

Because The Opportunity Agenda is a new organization, as is our articulation of the **Opportunity Frame**, we're very interested in understanding how you're using this kit. What aspects of the **Opportunity Frame** are most helpful in your work? Where does the frame fall short? What do you think is the best way to get others to start talking about opportunity in their work? We would love to hear from you at info@opportunityagenda.org.

The Opportunity Agenda is also creating a streaming video archive of people across the country telling their own stories about opportunity in America. Send your stories, in written, audio, or video format, to us at: The Opportunity Agenda, 568 Broadway, Suite 302, New York, NY 10012. We'll post the best submissions, text, audio, and video, on our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

New York

568 Broadway, Suite 302
New York, NY 10012
Tel: 212.334.5977
Fax: 212.334.2656

www.opportunityagenda.org

Washington, DC

2000 Florida Avenue NW, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: 202.387.1189
Fax: 301.576.5780



Spin Project

149 Natoma Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
Tel: 415.227-4300

www.spinproject.org

"The Opportunity Agenda is a project of the Tides Center"