



Beyond Access & Representation: Media Case Studies

Movement Matters
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INTRODUCTION

Television and film have responded to the demographic shifts and growing politicization of people in the U.S. with an increase in people of color-focused and social justice-themed productions; both to monetize the political moment and as a result of advocates working within the industry for systemic change (ie: Color of Change, Firelight Media, Pop Culture Collaborative). There is undoubted proof that political narratives centering people of color such as LoveCraft Country, Vida, Vampires v. The Bronx, and When They See Us have audiences and producers who believe in their importance enough to fund, watch, fundraise, petition, and uplift it.

COVID and the racial justice uprising of 2020 stretched our imaginations with regards to what is possible. The need and desire to continue production has led to experimentation in the fields of filmmaking and TV. We can more easily imagine bicoastal collaborations, film festivals curated, coordinated, and presented fully online, experimentation in cinematography using COVID safety guidelines. Etc. These case studies aim to build on that energy of possibility and urgency.

This report aims to provide contemporary examples of collaborations between filmmakers and social justice advocates who are interested in producing visionary media as well as reenvisioning the process by which this media is produced. The case studies below range from individual artists' efforts to organizations collaborating with teams of creatives. In each example we highlighted best practices we can replicate in our own work as artists and/or organizers.

The case studies are a combination of interviews and research, with one case study, "The Infiltrators", being composed solely of online research:

Case Study 1: Organizers & Filmmakers Produce a Web-Series

Based on a phone interview with Josh Healey, formerly at Movement Generation, about MG's co-production of the North Pole web-series.

Case Study 2: Creative Decisions that Include & Are Accountable to Directly Impacted Communities Based on interviews available online with filmmakers Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera about their film "The Infiltrators".

Case Study 3: Disrupting Capitalism & Colonization through Experimentation Based on a phone interview with director of "The Monster and The Storm", Eddie Martinez.

Case Study 4: Pop Culture and Advocacy

Based on a phone interview with Program Director Tracy Van Dyke and review of Pop Culture Collaborative's online literature.

Case Study 5: The Movement for a More Participatory Media Infrastructure

Based on a phone interview with Network Strategies Director at Media Justice, Teresa Basilio Gaztambide.

Inciting this research was a recognition that as filmmakers we are not “just making films”, but in fact making culture. Through our stories, we are either perpetuating or challenging a culture rooted in oppression. While social justice themed films garner greater exposure for new filmmakers, the way these films are made do not inherently challenge patriarchal, white supremacist and capitalist legacies by which the film industry and filmmaking processes were developed. Everything from white skin tones being prioritized during lighting, the veneration of directors, the standardization of linear storytelling, the majority-white, male writer’s room writing about BIPOC stories, and the determination of whether a film is going to be successful enough to grant it funding- is rooted in a culture of not only exclusion, but of oppression. These practices harm both filmmakers and the audiences they wish to serve, despite developing progressive narratives.

One fundamental way we can challenge oppression in filmmaking is by opening up our creative process and collaborating with the people who constantly fight to change systemic oppression. However, due to the high specialization of each of these fields (filmmaking and organizing), it can often feel difficult to understand where there may be opportunities for collaboration, where autonomy is needed, what accountability means and what approaches exist for working through the natural challenges that arise from these collaborations.

As a filmmaker who initially developed her skills and political consciousness alongside organizing spaces and popular educators, I entered this project with a very specific and explicit bias: the idea that process matters as much as the content produced. While conducting my research and before interviewing filmmakers, I encountered recurring themes and questions with regards to what I wanted to know about ways the production process was being expanded. Below are a list of themes and questions to help guide your reading of the case studies:

- **Reframing the production process:** How is the time invested in the production process benefiting participants beyond the completion of the project?
- **Identifying the cultural strategy:** What goal is the production achieving beyond the completion of a product? How is it contributing? Is this serving “the industry” to make structural changes? Is it serving working people to make economic and political gains?
- **Defining meaningful engagement:** What are the ways for people to engage in the production process and with the final product that challenge the socio-political status quo? How can creatives open up space for more meaningful engagements from organizers? How can organizers open up spaces for creatives to engage meaningfully?
- **Measuring success:** What does a “successful” production partnership look like? What are different measures that are used to gauge success?

This report began as an independent study during my time as a student at the Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema. The study was designed to better understand the industry landscape I would want to enter as a community media educator transitioning into filmmaking once I graduated. Because the study was so aligned with work that interested people within my professional network as a cultural worker, Movement Matters encouraged me to share my findings more widely as a report.

I would like to give special thanks to consultants in this research project, David Haiman from Movement Matters and Steele Filipek at Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema. Both were instrumental throughout my research and writing in their detailed feedback of drafts, layout readability, and vision for distribution. I want to extend my gratitude also to Teresa Basilio Gaztambide and B. Loewe for their active support in connecting me with interviewees and providing insight into the social justice filmmaking landscape during the early stages of the project. Of course, a very special thank you to the filmmakers and program directors who were willing to spend time sharing their experiences with me in the middle of a pandemic and in between parenting duties or campaign launches. Interviewees include: Josh Healey, Eddie Martinez, Tracy Van Dyke, and Teresa Gaztambide.

Update:

This document, as all our work, is continually being updated and we welcome and thank our community for continuing to build with us and trusting us enough to voice their concerns, experiences, and expertise.

Upon releasing this report, undocumented filmmaker, Luna X Moya, offered up a critique about highlighting a film pertaining to undocumented people without undocumented filmmakers on the production team. Additionally, for "Media Lessons" specific to this case study she suggested adding: *Filmmakers and organizers should assure they are aligned in political philosophy before collaborating on a project together.*

The [Undocumented Filmmakers Collective](#) was a resource put forth as an example of leadership "tackling the systemic inequities that undocumented immigrants face in the field of filmmaking". The collective centers "the expertise of undocumented people not only as sources

Case Study 1

Organizers & Filmmakers Produce a Web-Series

"I come out of the Hip-hop generation, which says before you blow up the world you have to blow up your block."

- Josh Healey, Co-Writer/Director/Producer on The North Pole Web-Series

PROJECT	The North Pole.
PRODUCERS	Movement Generation, Rosario Dawson
TIME OF PRODUCTION	Each season took 6-9 months to write and 4 months to complete pre-production. The first season took 2 years to complete.
AUDIENCE	The primary audience was newly politicized and non-politicized Black, Brown, and Immigrant young people in their 20s and 30s based in Oakland and similar communities across the country.
GOAL	The web series aimed to go beyond raising awareness and instead connect young people with grassroots organizations. It was also developed as a political education tool for organizations involved in the production.
RESULT	Incorporated into training materials and university curriculums.

The North Pole is a free web series streaming on YouTube co-produced by the Oakland based collective Movement Generation and Rosario Dawson. The first season is centered around three friends working towards climate justice while trying not to get displaced by the increasing gentrification of their neighborhood. The second season revolves around those same three friends attempting to fight back against one of their deportation proceedings by having him running for mayor of their city.

The series was developed by two teams: The filmmaking team and the political team. The political team was composed of individuals representing Movement Generation, Just Cause, CultureStrike and other organizations tied to both local work and larger national networks that would serve to distribute the final production. The political team developed the issues, overall story, and distribution strategy over several months, while the creative team was composed of filmmakers, actors, production crew and consultants who brought those stories into fruition. Key members of the filmmaking team were co-director Yvan Iturriaga, writer Reyna Amara and writer/actor Donte Clark. They are Oakland based artists, but work primarily in Hollywood.

The teams were coordinated by writer/director/producer Josh Healey who was on staff at Movement Generation during the time of production. MG, Healey and much of the film-making team had already developed a working relationship through comedic shorts they had produced in a similar fashion, titled Green Collar comedy, which included guest appearances from Boots Riley.

Before finalizing the story for each season there were a series of conversations that allowed teams to remain accountable to a specific cultural analysis while also receiving feedback on the effectiveness of the storytelling. A tension named by Healey during this process was the organizer's inflexibility in giving up certain aspects of campaign work or "real-world" power dynamics to better serve the story. This was mediated and ultimately worked through, but important to note as a recurring theme to create space for when artists and organizers work together.

The production was not high in budget by industry-standards, but it was by grassroots organizing standards. All actors, artists, and crew were paid for their labor above the minimum-wage, while locations, props and equipment were often borrowed, haggled, or donated.

The North Pole, Season 1 was released on Youtube for free. On opening night organizers sold out all 1,000 seats of the largest theater in Oakland. This was an emotional moment for the organizers and producers who worked tirelessly for 2 years to complete the first season. Afterwards the series was toured in Oakland. Josh Healey reflects that these screenings were not as well attended given that the series had already been fully released online.

Media Lessons

- ★ Create mechanisms for the political and creative arms of the project to work together.
- ★ Involve local members of national coalitions who will ultimately be instrumental in the distribution of the content.
- ★ Create space for national coalitions to serve as a vehicle for distributing content outside industry-owned platforms.
- ★ Assure pre-existing relationships have been established between the creative and political arms on smaller projects before embarking on a larger project.
- ★ Build feedback into the timeline at various points during the production process.
- ★ Expect a longer timeline due to the collaborative nature of the work.
- ★ Do not upload the content online before touring.

The webseries also toured in some cities (Phoenix, New York City) where members of the political team had existing networks working on issues of climate justice and displacement. For these screenings, some of the artists were brought to speak on the production experience and local organizers were brought in to speak on their work and connect audiences with local efforts. In New York City this included working with organizations such as Uprose and FUREE.

During the launch of the second season, producers opted to hold off on releasing the entire series online. Instead, they held “premiere nights” across various cities and provided hosts with “premiere packages” that included games, social media toolkits and talking points to structure their events. In addition to organizations, the series also toured at college and university campuses given the high demand from educators to use the series in their curriculum; an audience that was not initially considered.

- ★ Curate premiere nights in multiple cities, include premiere packages with social media content, activities and curriculum.
- ★ Connect with local organizers that work on the issue(s) pertaining to your film when screening in a city outside of your own. Connect audiences to local work when possible.
- ★ Coordinate with influencers to create a buzz on social media during the distribution phase.
- ★ Encourage organizers and educators to incorporate the content into their training series and classrooms.

High-profile artists with cameos in the series, such as Boots Riley and co-producer Rosario Dawson, were part of a social media strategy to increase awareness about the existence of the series. Producers expressed competition between Facebook and Youtube as an obstacle for widespread promotion via social media and attributed a large portion of the limited success of the webseries via social media to structural limitations across these platforms.

Producers saw a lot of traction and use of the webseries for political education and activation purposes in the first 3 months after distribution. Apart from this, it has mainly been participating organizations that have made the most use of the content, incorporating the webseries or certain webisodes into their existing training and curriculum.

FOR FURTHER READING:

For storytelling tools you can use with organizers to develop a campaign-specific story visit [Center for Story Based Strategy](#).

Telling a New Story: [“A Collaborative Checklist for Social Justice Leaders Using Narrative Strategies for Change”](#)

Case Study 2

Creative Decisions that Include & Are Accountable to Directly Impacted Communities

"We depended on Marco's, Viri's, and Claudio's descriptions of life in detention. We had to get them on board with this creative approach because they were the ones who were going to open up that part of the film for us. Then we did something that documentarians are not supposed to do: we showed them a rough cut of the film."

- Cristina Ibarra, Co-Director

PROJECT	The Infiltrators.
PRODUCERS	Multiple producers, awarded multiple grants towards completion. Co-directed by filmmaking couple Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera.
TIME OF PRODUCTION	Two presidential terms.
AUDIENCE	The film aims to be accessible to families like that of filmmakers who crossed the border and also a broader audience who do not necessarily care about immigration.
GOAL	Engage audiences to think critically about life in detention centers, highlight the tactics used by activists to infiltrate detention centers.
RESULT	Hybrid feature length film that is part documentary, part heist film. Aka: the Oceans 11 of Immigration. An additional impact once the film won recognition at Sundance was the targeting of protagonist Claudio Rojas by Immigration Customs Enforcement.

The Infiltrators follows a group of undocumented young people as they get themselves arrested in order to infiltrate a for-profit detention center and organize detainees from the inside. Specifically, filmmakers Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera worked with organizers at the National Immigrant Youth Alliance after the group already had a few rounds of sending organizers inside. Rivera saw the political actions on the news and contacted his personal networks to gain access to the group. During a speaking engagement, activist Marco Saavedra mentions that part of the reason they were comfortable giving Rivera access to their stories was that they had seen the filmmaker in conferences and other political spaces. It was clear his commitment was long-term and that he cared about the issue, not just about "getting the story". Despite having worked on immigration-related films before, both filmmakers acknowledge that it took them about a year of working with NIYA to fully understand the legal process faced by people in deportation proceedings.

The film has garnered critical acclaim due to its hybrid nature: part documentary, part narrative film. The filmmakers explain that first they cut a rough draft of the film entirely in documentary fashion. This initial cut showed the additional knowledge the audience needed to make sense of the issue. The filmmakers considered filling in those gaps with animated flashbacks. The rough draft shown to the organizers had both documentary footage and storyboard animation.

For obvious reasons, much of the imagery that was missing in the story took place inside the detention center. To get a better sense of the details that would make up the animation, the filmmakers facilitated memory workshops to access organizers' experiences inside. They recreated entire spaces at Brower's Detention Center, which allowed for details that at that point had been unattainable during sit-down interviews. When filmmakers finally decided to switch from animation to scenarios using actors, the memory workshops informed everything from the locations scouted to small, seemingly insignificant details that add the weight of authenticity to the story (ie: the surplus of paper and how its used inside). Ibarra attributes the memory workshop as the point where organizers became real creative collaborators in the development of the film, in particular organizer Carlos Rojas.

In order to have a better sense of their roles, organizers shared stories with actors about their upbringing, their approach to the work, and ultimately what motivated them to risk getting deported and separated from their families.

The film was well received once it was screened. It was celebrated for both the importance of content, and also its hybrid form and approach to storytelling.

Media Lessons

- ★ Get involved in organizing networks over a sustained period of time before starting a project.
- ★ Make sure to really understand the technical aspect of how the issue impacts people's lives.
- ★ Allow for the content to dictate the form.
- ★ Create opportunities for "doc subjects" to become collaborators, not just to provide feedback.
- ★ Experiment with exercises other than the interview to retrieve important information (somatic exercises, recreating spaces, etc).
- ★ Respond to the negative impacts the release of your film may have on the subject's life. Take the lead from organizers and directly impacted people on what your role should be in aiding the situation.
- ★ Use public platforms and large gatherings of people to ask for support and direct people to concrete ways they can take action, especially right after they have been emotionally moved by the film.

After the film received notable acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival, Carlos Rojas was targeted by ICE and is now threatened with deportation for his vocal activism. While touring the rest of the film festival route, audiences were asked to support Roja's case by signing petitions and donating to the campaign for his freedom.

Whenever possible at public events, filmmakers brought organizers to speak alongside them.

The day the film was set to release in public theaters, theaters were mandated to shut down nationwide because of the COVID pandemic, affecting the number of people who have been able to watch the film on a mass scale.



Share or pass the mic to organizers when presenting.



Assure filmmakers and organizers align in political philosophy before collaborating.

FOR FURTHER READING:

The [Undocumented Filmmakers Collective](#) is an example of leadership "tackling the systemic inequities that undocumented immigrants face in the field of filmmaking". The collecting centers "the expertise of undocumented people not only as sources of stories but more importantly as creators, artists, and primary audiences."

Film quarterly interviews Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera "[By Radical Means Necessary: Interview with Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera](#)".

Q&A with filmmakers and organizers after screening of the film MOMI at Home; [The Infiltrators: Alex River, Cristina Ibarra and Special Guests.](#)

Case Study 3

Disrupting Capitalism & Colonization through Experimentation

**“The real evil of colonization is colonization of the spirit.
And the sole province of art is spirit”**

- Eddie Martinez, Director of the Monster and the Storm

PROJECT	The Monster and the Storm.
PRODUCERS	Concordia Studio, Firelight Media.
TIME OF PRODUCTION	3 years, still in production.
AUDIENCE	Latinx diaspora, millennials, people interested in remixing culture.
GOAL	Engage as a director in making films that share power and autonomy through methods of collaboration.
RESULT	Docu-narrative with a non-hierarchical decision making structure and a subject who is also part owner of the LLC attached to the film.

The Monster and the Storm is a docu-narrative currently in production. It is about Godzilla coming to Puerto Rico looking for a person named Shawn; Shawn is, in turn, also looking for Godzilla as a proxy for his absent father. The film is based on the personal experience of real-life cosplayer Shawn and also serves as a metaphor for the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico/Latin America.

Initially the film was a documentary that followed a cosplayer in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. However; a deeper story was uncovered upon bringing Shawn into the production process as a more significant collaborator. Eddie Martinez, the director, gave Shawn some writing exercises, through which both Shawn and the filmmaking team discovered that his affinity for Godzilla paralleled the relationship he had with the father he never had a chance to meet. This realization came once nearly all the filming was done and at a time when the production crew could do limited travelling due to COVID. It has added another layer to the story and re-prioritized what the crew needs to shoot in order to complete the film.

While the topic of the film did not start out inherently political, Martinez did seek to find “a way of making films that share power and autonomy through methods of collaboration”. This was especially important to him as a creator of Puerto Rican descent who classifies the relationship between the island and the U.S. as a colonial one.

Additionally, as a filmmaker with extensive experience working on other people's industry projects, he maintains that "the structure of media making mirrors extractivist culture and the field of documentary filmmaking [similar to the field of anthropology] is rampant with otherism and saviorism and must uncouple itself from that ancestry".

As a creator of color, this extractivist culture had an impact on an individual level: "there is a lot of suffering that happens when you cannot be yourself, which is what happens in the industry." Using this framework, representation and access into the industry is not enough, because it is not at the root of the problem that is a dominant culture rooted in taking, taking, taking... and profiting (extractivism).

Martinez sought to engage with a production process that mirrored his own values; where all members of the creative team were able to make decisions together. Concretely this looked like Shawn moving beyond "subject" and becoming a part of all conversations pertaining to creative and financial decisions. He is part owner of the LLC that was created for the film and, since he is also an artist, was able to contribute storyboards for the film. At one point the group even collectively decided to forgo a large grant that required them to give up their creative control, but would help them finish the film.

What then is the role of the director in a non-hierarchical production structure? Martinez had to re-imagine what the role of the director was in such a collaborative process. He learned that a director in this particular structure directs the process so decisions can continue being made collectively and facilitates in a way that opens up space for others within his team.

Systemic oppression perpetuates itself in the film and TV industry by providing financial incentives to content tied to a specific world view. Martinez explains that this is why heavily-funded documentaries are generally about a celebrity or well known story. If a production is "cutting edge" or experimenting with form, it needs to get made first. Otherwise producers have no secure way of knowing if it's going to be successful on a mass scale. In short, producers are unwilling to invest money if they can't assure it'll make them money in return on Netflix and other mass platforms.

Media Lessons



Identify the detrimental impacts of extractivist culture on an individual, interpersonal, structural, and cultural level.



Redefine the role of director and subject. Directors help direct the process so decisions can continue being made collectively. Subjects are a part of all creative and financial decisions.



Provide holistic funding support for underrepresented filmmakers that: sustains financial support for the project, allows for the production team to remain in creative control, supports filmmakers in expanding their professional network and leadership development.

Because “Monster and the Storm” experiments with both form and structure, Martinez has struggled to secure sustained funding for the project. At first the project got an influx of grants, but as time passed and the focus shifted, funding became harder to secure.

What has been central to assuring ongoing production and continued faith in this experiment has been what Martinez calls a lucky coincidence, but seems also to make the case for a more holistic model of support for filmmakers from underrepresented communities experimenting in filmmaking. Martinez has been the recipient of 3 fellowships at the same time, all strengthening different areas of the project.

Concordia Studio has provided direct support for the project; including paying for story consultants, and an executive producer who whole-heartedly respects the non-hierarchical structure. Firelight Media has allowed a space for Martinez to connect with other filmmakers of color and helped expand his professional network. Finally, receiving the Rockwood Institute Fellowship allowed for Martinez to receive leadership development support that has been personally beneficial and played a role in exploring leadership, trust and power in different ways.

As an individual filmmaker and director Eddie Martinez is seeking to engage in a production process that reflects his values. On an interpersonal level that means sharing creative power and on a structural level it means challenging the legacy of extractivism inherent in documentary filmmaking.

FOR FURTHER READING:

On the lack of support BIPOC directors have experienced in the industry, retaliation experienced when calling out racism and why there is a need for sustained support of BIPOC filmmakers to guarantee their long-term success read [“They Set Us Up to Fail”: Black Directors of the 90’s Speak Out](#).

On the importance of this political moment being used as a catalyst to challenge and change the filmmaking industry read, [“Why We Need Black Filmmakers to Tell the Story of 2020”](#), by Firelight founder and filmmaker Stanley Nelson.

Case Study 4

Popular Culture and Advocacy

"We so often have to be thinking about the power that involves Washington, DC, and Capitol Hill. But often, it extends to Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood," he says..."People don't experience issues, they experience life. And when you are able to articulate a problem, a path, and a solution in a way that people can follow, then you have the power to credibly move the infrastructure that moves the [popular] culture".

- Rashad Robinson, Color of Change

PROJECT	Campaigns between Hollywood producers and non-profits to amplify social justice causes as well as change structural racism within the industry.
PRODUCERS	National Domestic Workers Alliance, Color of Change, Participant Media, Netflix.
TIME OF PRODUCTION	Sustained, long-term relationships between organizational leadership, thought leaders, and values-aligned producers.
AUDIENCE	Mass audiences.
GOAL	Change people's economic and political reality by gaining popular support for progressive policies through mass-produced media.
RESULT	Increase awareness of and empathy towards people's lived realities, influence mass audiences towards progressive values, increase representation of BIPOC creatives within Hollywood.

The Pop Culture Collaborative is a national community of funders who have banded together in a commitment to support narrative change on a mass scale. They fund media projects that aim to shift the national conversation in the direction of social justice values and simultaneously advance policy campaigns that result in material gains for the populations targeted by injustice. Among their most notable fundee's have been (1) the National Domestic Workers Alliance who successfully launched two media campaigns in relation to feature films pertaining to domestic workers and (2) Color of Change who has successfully worked with writers rooms and filmmakers within the industry to assure communities most targeted by police brutality are centered in criminal justice narratives.

The National Domestic Workers Alliance's first campaign "Be the Help" galvanized media attention for domestic workers during the 2012 Golden Globes, where the film "The Help" was nominated for multiple awards. Recognizing that one of the primary challenges in garnering mass support for their campaign work lay in the invisibility of women's labor, particularly that of NDWA's base of poor women of color, they made a decision to invest resources in media to broaden support for their work beyond their base.

In preparation for the Golden Globes, NDWA trained members as media spokespeople, designed press releases connecting Octavia Spencer's award speeches to the pending California Bill of Rights for domestic workers, and took advantage of every mention of "The Help" on social media to bring awareness back to actual domestic workers' experiences. As a result, most articles released about The Help the day after the awards focused their attention on NDWA's campaign work. Executive Director Ai-Jen Poo, notes "We got more media attention [at that moment] than we had in all of our bill of rights campaigns combined".

After their success with the "Be the Help" campaign, NDWA committed to investing permanent time and resources towards engaging pop culture to help support their organizing work: they created a position for Pop Culture Strategist. Their second campaign focused on working with director Alfonso Cuarón during the release of the feature film Roma. NDWA partnered with Participant, which co-produced Roma, to devise a multi-pronged digital strategy to ensure visibility for Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights and ALIA, the online, worker-owned platform developed and launched by NDWA to help housecleaners access benefits. Participant and NDWA hosted screenings in 5 major U.S. cities with local domestic workers before premiering to assure it could be used as a tool to mobilize other workers once launched. NDWA launched a microsite, Roma.Domesticworkers.org, which featured a short PSA by Alfonso Cuarón uplifting NDWA's work. The site received over 93K views. A twitter campaign was launched alongside the premiere of the film with the hashtag #HeroinesInOurHomes, ensuring people would link NDWA anytime they spoke about Roma on social media.

Media Lessons

- ★ Hijack pop culture events via social media. #BeTheHelp
- ★ Develop intentional impact strategy during the distribution stage of a film release in partnership with a social justice organization.
- ★ Host pre-release screenings with organizers nationwide so the film can be used as an educational tool once launched.
- ★ Make sure organizers share the stage with influencers on large public platforms.
- ★ Devise hashtag campaigns in line with org media strategy. I.e: Visibility = #HeroinesInOurHomes
- ★ Amplify solutions that benefit membership base and move past sole visibility: ALIA platform.
- ★ Launch microsite that ties the film to the issue.
- ★ Secure videos from high profile influencers to amplify org messages.

In a coordinated action during the Oscars, Alfonso Cuarón passed his mic to Ai-Jen Poo to make sure the film's platform amplified not simply his vision for the artwork, but the real-life stories and needs of domestic workers like the protagonist in his film. *Roma* was not a movement film per se, but intentionality around impact strategies during the distribution phase made this campaign a success.

Pop Culture Collaborative also highlights the work of Color of Change as a group that has successfully worked with industry artists to change narratives around the criminal justice system in relation to Black communities. Initially Color of Change launched a research study on the representation of communities of color in cop shows, which then grew into accountability campaigns to correct the ways shows like "Law and Order" criminalized Black people and promoted civil rights abuses.

Any time shows would unjustly target communities, on-screen representation that causes real life harm, Color of Change would mobilize their large online platform to launch social media campaigns that caused the show to trend negatively.

Next COC organized "salons", gathering spaces for "creative leadership, artists, visionaries, and professionals in Hollywood and in social justice movements" to network and brainstorm ways of shifting industry narratives towards social justice values that would have a positive impact on Black lives. This included developing relationships with Black creatives to assure more equitable representation in writer's rooms. Additionally, COC has developed long term and close knit partnerships with producers and showrunners in which it acts as an intermediary to ensure writer's rooms are consulting with social justice organizations as early as possible in the story development phase. Some of the ways COC partners were able to successfully change the story development process was by supporting writers in reimagining characters' roles in police brutality narratives and interviewing actual victims of police brutality to better understand their lived experience. This resulted in writers having a better understanding of the legal intricacies involved in dealing with abuse cases and gave writers new ideas, more grounded in reality, to work into the story. Color of Change has done this successfully with the Netflix production "Seven Seconds", which had 84% audience approval rating, won Regina King an Emmy, and helped win the COC campaign to end cash bail. COC was also brought in by Ava Duvernay and Netflix to consult on the marketing for "When They See Us", with the goal of "Translating narrative and story to action, the partnership created a pathway and opportunity for new audiences to connect to a larger movement for prosecutorial accountability". The film was rolled out with actual police accountability campaigns led by COC partners, which audiences could participate in after being emotionally moved by the film.



Mobilize a large digital base for accountability campaigns directed at shows that have harmful representations of impacted communities.



Create "salons" around your issue: informal and formal networking spaces for cross-sector conversation and relationship building.



Ensure collaboration between writer's rooms and social justice organizations from the story development phase.

Through these case studies we see Pop Culture Collaborative's grantees investing resources to work outside of the non-profit sector with industry professionals and influencers to assure 1) visibility for their campaign work 2) changing the conditions which perpetuate systemic injustice 3) creating narrative pathways that show alternatives to systemic injustice as achievable on a mass scale. Doing this requires moving past transactional partnerships and instead building long-term relationships based on mutual values.

FOR FURTHER READING:

If you are interested in reading more about these particular case studies you can read [From the Help to Roma: How the Domestic Workers Alliance is Transforming Narrative in Pop Culture](#) and [From Seven Seconds to When They See Us: How Color of Change is Transforming Narratives in Pop Culture](#).

PCC also encourages storytellers to abandon white supremacy-laden "apocalypse" narratives and instead focus on engage audiences with pluralist values; which they list in their article "[Why I Wish I'd Never Watched The Handmaid's Tale](#)".

"[Black and Brown Indie Producers Press Hollywood for Commitments to End Systemic Racism](#)".

Case Study 5

The Movement for a More Participatory Media Infrastructure

“There is a long history of racialized disinformation targeting BIPOC communities in the U.S. Although this has long been a strategy to justify, codify, and naturalize white supremacy, the tools and technology have changed drastically and we need to keep our communities abreast of these changes so we can actively and definitively disrupt their power.”

- Teresa Basilio Gaztambide, Network Strategies Director at Media Justice

PROJECT	Disinformation Campaign.
PRODUCERS	The Media Justice Center, Disinformation Defense League.
TIME OF PRODUCTION	During and after the 2020 presidential elections.
AUDIENCE	BIPOC, low-income communities, constituents of coalition members.
GOAL	Produce content that raises awareness of disinformation targeting BI-POC low-income communities of color during the election and COVID. Decrease the power of disinformation on BIPOC, low-income communities of color and assure they get to the poles and wear those masks!
RESULT	Provide BIPOC communities with tools, resources, events and ideas on how to disrupt racialized disinformation in their own family, community or movement, especially as it relates to the election/voting and Covid 19 health information. Created a #DisruptDisinformation toolkit, facilitated webinars on Deep Fakes (visual mis & disinformation) and the history of Racialized Disinformation, and more.

The Media Justice Center is a national organization working for fundamental communication rights for BIPOC communities. They do so in coalition with grassroots groups across the country and in partnership with other national advocacy groups, with ongoing campaigns that aim to dismantle the racialized ways media policies are used to target and marginalize poor communities of color. MJ’s current campaigns include: securing open and affordable internet, an end to digital security and surveillance, an end to high-tech policing in prisons and holding big tech companies accountable for living up to the Silicon Valley slogan “move fast and break everything” at the expense of communities of color.

In the midst of the 2020 elections, MJ worked on a campaign to counter racialized disinformation targeted at communities of color, such as deep fake videos downplaying the power of voters of color and what to do when misinformation is being disseminated at a protest. The campaign was launched publicly a week prior to the elections with a series of webinars supported by social media and racial justice organizations. This effort is part of a broader coalition including other movement building organizations, researchers, journalists, communications orgs, policy orgs, etc.

Media production for the campaign looked different for each of the member orgs and is based on their needs. For example, TRSM Radio, a Minneapolis radio station produced by local organizers and housed in a building that is shared with grassroots organizing groups, has decided to produce audio PSAs about misinformation in 6 different languages based on the populations they serve. Conversely, MJ member Line Break Media, which is a collective made up of artists who partner with organizers, will be producing a non-localized parody of the "This is Your Brain on Drugs" PSA - "This is Your Brain on Disinformation". It is produced for a broader audience, but for the same campaign. Another member, KRSM a low power radio station in Minneapolis, MN is committing to broadcasting content and organizing other public television and radio stations to do the same. Rather than a set audience or a set path to distribute media through industry institutions, MJ relies on the networks held by member organizations to disseminate their content. It is important to note that MJ is not producing media for a mass audience, but rather for the communities that are connected to their networks and directly impacted by the issues they represent.

In addition to producing media, member organizations are also collecting data on the disinformation disseminated in their communities. In this way the production process and campaign serves as an opportunity to gather localized data on a national scale that can be used to serve the interests of organizing groups. This information was shared with campaign partner Disinfo Defense League which analyzed, consolidated and developed educational tools. These tools can then be used by organizations to equip their members and campaigns with research to legitimize their experiences to a broader audience.

Media Lessons

- ★ Align the launch of the media campaign with the important political event it is meant to influence.
- ★ Adapt the form of the content based on the needs and capacity of the organization.
- ★ Use coalition spaces to centralize, disseminate, and coordinate various media produced and data gathered.
- ★ Rely on the networks held by the members to disseminate the content, rather than a set audience or a set path to distribute media through industry institutions.
- ★ De-centralize the production process to simultaneously serve as a call to collect data and create educational materials.
- ★ Make sure individual artists assess their relationships to the communities they are trying to make films about and invest in developing long-term relationships with groups and people organizing on the ground outside of the purpose of advancing their own careers.

For Media Justice the fight goes beyond representation and access, and identifies media ownership by BIPOC communities as key to redefining power relationships in a monopolized, corporate media landscape. Ownership is especially important as corporate media produces narratives on a mass scale that promote their own interest and are ultimately harmful to communities of color. This is why MJ also works to coordinate and amplify movement media in relation to specific campaign needs.

For MJ, the question of who is leading and participating in the production process is as important as the content being produced. It is the very communities for whom production has been systematically kept inaccessible who must be telling their own stories and, through this process, creating their own systems for production and dissemination of content. Under this approach individual artists invested in telling social justice narratives, who are not a part of the communities organizing on those social justice issues, must develop long-term relationships with these groups in order to assess what their role as artists can be.

FOR FURTHER READING:

For a deeper look into the way the media industry has historically furthered the economic marginalization of communities of color and proposals for how to remedy this harm read [Media 2070](#).

For an example of how artists have aligned their art to develop narratives dictated by needs identified by organizers look through the Center for Cultural Power's [No Going Back: A COVID-19 Cultural Strategy Activation Guide for Artist & Activists](#).

For an example of anti-oppressive curriculum used by filmmakers to facilitate skills sharing and storytelling in non-professional filmmaking spaces, check out [Global Action Project's](#) curriculum.

For more on how organizations committed to mass base-building are also investing in narrative change read [Reframe's Creating an Ecosystem for Narrative Power](#).

CONCLUSION & SUMMARY

Filmmakers and organizers have ample opportunities to open up and engage with the creative process while being honest about both our interest and capacity. These case studies give us examples of the possibilities available to us throughout the production process to align our vision as social justice advocates working within different mediums.

A key lesson across the studies was the importance of **building working relationships where there is mutual understanding of each person's role and contribution to the production process.** In the case of *The North Pole*, these relationships were established through previous collaborations on smaller projects between the organization, Movement Generation, and filmmakers. These relationships are critical when approaching significant hurdles like disagreement between organizers and filmmakers on how close to reality to stay, especially at times when reality doesn't serve the story. Answering questions like: "How close to reality do we want to stay and does it take our character where they need to go?" bring up potential disagreements over what details of the larger vision we must sacrifice and what details are critical to understanding our story destination. These difficult editing decisions are common when working on a story based on real events, but especially necessary to think through when 1) your content will be used for political education purposes and/or a kind of historical record and 2) the final production is being co-signed by grassroots organizations working directly with people impacted by the issues you're covering.

Being mindful of the impact of our productions once they reach the distribution stage and our responsibility act accordingly alongside directly impacted communities is another important take away. No sooner was *The Infiltrators* released (and highly praised) than ICE came after one of the film's main protagonists, Claudio Rojas. Filmmakers were able to use the platforms they had access to while touring the film to garner public support for Claudio's case; collecting signatures to petition ICE to end his deportation proceedings. In collaboration with organizers and former detainees, filmmakers Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera were able to shift the final stages of production to garner support that resulted in material change for the people they repeatedly named as collaborators on the film. In addition to the traditional interviews, filmmakers also experimented with other forms of memory work (such as somatics) to recreate the detention centers and extract details that would give the story its authentic weight. Doing so in a way that allowed interviewees to re-engage those memories in a proactive rather than retraumatizing way. **Rather than extracting the information and creating the stories themselves, Ibarra and Rivera, opened up space for interviewees like Rojas to contribute to the shape the story would take on screen.** Experimentation in developing the story as well as in artform gave *The Infiltrators* the critical acclaim it received as a hybrid docu-narrative.

Filmmaker, Eddie Martinez, wanted his film "The Monster and the Storm" to experiment with both form and structure. What does it mean to be the director of a film in a non-hierarchical creative space? Martinez soon found out that his role must be adapted to that of a facilitator to assure the production was moving forward and everyone could participate fully outside of their "official" production titles (ie: Shawn, is also a visual artist and provided the storyboards for many grants).

As a means of challenging filmmaking hierarchies reflective of the imperialism that still holds under colonial rule in his native Puerto Rico, Martinez wanted the protagonist of his film, Shawn, involved in all aspects of production; beginning with financial ownership of his own story. So, when Martinez created an LLC for the film, he made sure Shawn was co-owner. Financial support has been critical as an independent filmmaker and doubly so as a filmmaker of color. Martinez recounts being able to move forward with the project because of the support the production, and also Martinez individually, received from three different fellowships. This kind of **holistic support, which includes money, but also professional development and network building with other filmmakers of color, is necessary for films challenging dominant narratives and also working outside production systems derived from the Hollywood system.**

Distribution methods differed between the Media Justice Center and the Pop Culture Collaborative. The Pop Culture Collaborative (PCC's) highlights films like *Roma*, which have strategically been paired with production houses at the very end of the production process. This has assured the distribution of the film can both serve as an educational tool and also sway policy that will have a positive impact on communities represented in the film. The director can still retain their creative vision, not making the film a "movement film" necessarily, and still assure their film has both a mass audience and mass impact. This is the key focus of PCC's work, **reaching a critical mass and having a social impact largely dependent on developing powerful alliances between advocates, celebrities and industry professionals.** The Media Justice Center's distribution mechanism is tied to their approach to production. While MJ has filmmakers who form part of a coalition, they do so not as individuals, but as a part of organizations who are accountable to organizers and communities. **The people producing media, collecting data, and distributing content are the very same people who are impacted by the issues.** This can result in longer pre-production, but assures that what is being produced will also serve the communities that are producing it and aims to disrupt the systems and institutions who perpetually harm low-income Black and Brown communities. As a result, this process creates multilingual cross-platform productions that are also informative and have a longer shelf-life than a theatrical release. Also critical to this process is that the means of distributing media is dependent on members' own extended networks. Therefore, if one of MJ's members is a public television station, this member could serve to reach public television stations nationwide.

There is so much work that has been done by cultural workers, youth media organizations, filmmakers, public media advocates and organizers to assure that we could reach this golden age of QT-BIPOC film production where access and representation are central tenets of equity in entertainment. Even as we celebrate, many of us hear the cautionary voices of our political elders telling us "we have been here before!" And still many others hear "there are still so many other ways and so much more we can attain!" These case studies provide but a fractal of the path that lies beyond access and representation; that point to radical institutional and systemic transformation, not just surface level change. To assure our stories are as powerful as our vision for liberation, we must also center conversations around ownership, power, class, and the right to creative experimentation.