FRAME WORKS

On Culture: Does defending the status quo work?

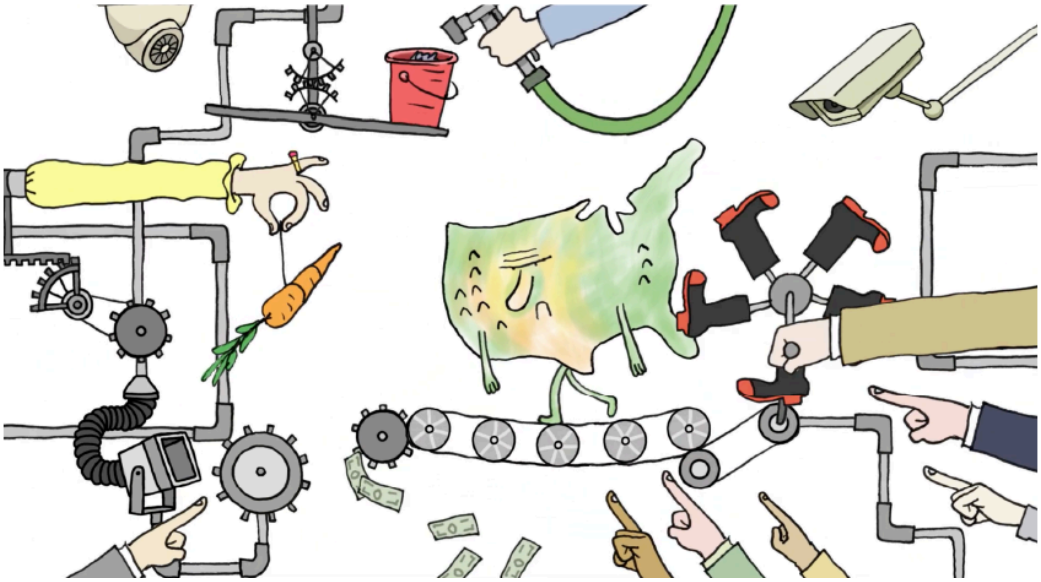
Mon, Mar 24, 2025 at 9:42 AM

FRAMEWORKS Culture Change Project

MARCH 2025

NEWSLETTER

On Culture



Friends and partners,

I'm struggling to write the opening of this newsletter. Talking about "troubled times" or using any other platitude to describe the moment we're living through seems trite when so many of us are worried about our families, our jobs, and our country. I imagine that many of you are also struggling and having difficulty figuring out how to talk about everything that's going on.

In the spirit of helping us make sense of what's going on, I want to share an article written by FrameWorks CEO Nat Kendall-Taylor for *The Contrarian*.

SHOW ME THE ARTICLE

What's going on?

In his article, Nat explores how a *system is rigged* narrative has been weaponized and used to justify efforts like firing public servants and ending aid programs around the world. Importantly, the article also talks about how we can (and must) counter those efforts through narratives of our own.

As Nat points out, just because a *system is rigged* narrative is being wielded by the far-right to perpetuate inequities doesn't mean we shouldn't engage with the idea that our systems are rigged. In fact, that's one of the reasons we *should*.

First, the system *is* rigged. We're living that reality every day—from the disproportionate impacts Black homeowners face following the Eaton Fire in California to an immigration system that targets unaccompanied children to unilateral decisions that will make it easier for corporations to dodge taxes. Second, our research shows that acknowledging that the deck is stacked against most of us can be a powerful tool in fighting back.

What *isn't* working?

When we defend the status quo and argue to "restore faith in our institutions," the message falls flat largely because most Americans already see that the system is rigged—they can *feel* the effects of structural racism and the consolidation of power among a wealthy few. Declining trust in the potential of our public institutions has real consequences, but attempting to redirect attention away from the ways they aren't working isn't convincing.

What can we do?

Instead, we need to reach out and acknowledge that our systems are rigged—and offer explanations of *how* and *why* they're rigged to counter the harmful and misleading narratives we're currently being inundated with. Then we need to offer *actual solutions* for un-rigging the system that make our society more just.

We're all being pulled in many directions right now. We may be trying

to address what's being done to immigrants, to trans kids, to our public health infrastructure, to our freedom of speech…but—*and*—all of these efforts depend on our ability to identify and address the many ways that our systems are rigged to benefit those in power at our expense. We can't cede the narrative to those determined to make our society ever more tilted and unfair. Instead, we must tell the story about the work that's required to unrig the system. That makes our shared narrative more powerful—and can help us fight back against attempts to keep us silent.

In solidarity,

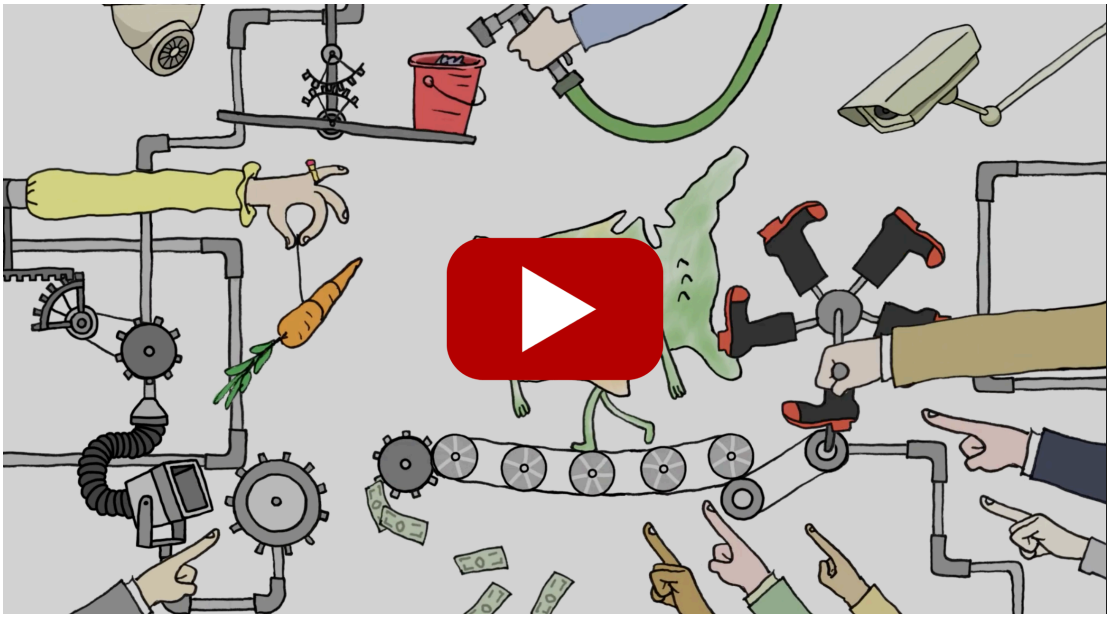


Clara Blustein Lindholm

NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS

EXPLAINER VIDEO: THE GREAT UNRIGGING

"Why are Americans so mad?" In this new animated video, we begin to answer that question as we walk through the system is rigged mindset: what it is, where it comes from, and how we can speak to it in ways that pave the way for systemic change.



YOUTUBE SHORTS: A DEEPER DIVE INTO *SYSTEM IS RIGGED* THINKING

We recently shared a 7-part video series with recommendations to help progressive communicators navigate the *system-is-rigged* mindset. From understanding the "ambition-feasibility paradox" to finding ways to appeal to our collective power, each video explores what we're finding and what it means for those working to tell better, more motivating stories about our country's rigged systems—and how we can unrig them.



UP NEXT!

NEW VIDEO SERIES: MINDSETS AND MOVEMENTS | COMING SOON
In the next installment of *Fast Frames*, we're exploring three of the most dominant mindsets in American culture: *Individualism*, *Otherism*, and *Fatalism*. These mindsets often block efforts to build demand for more just and inclusive systems. In each episode, we'll take a look at what the mindset is, how it works, and how we can use our communications to open up more productive and expansive ways of thinking about solving social problems.

FRAMING THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE | COMING SOON
Despite the increasing prominence of artificial intelligence in public life and discourse, there remains a lack of understanding about how AI works and what it might mean for our lives. By examining the deep assumptions that shape thinking about AI, we will identify and share strategies for

deepening understanding of AI technologies, the social implications of their use, and how they can be used on behalf of the public interest.

SPOTLIGHT ON CULTURE CHANGERS

INSIGHTS TO PRACTICE: A CONFERENCE TO INSPIRE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS | PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS COLLABORATIVE

This free, half-day virtual conference will convene public health leaders from across the country to discuss the latest research integral to advancing public health communications. Topics range from “How to Communicate About Health Equity” to “What Makes an Effective Public Health Messenger.”

HIRING A DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES | ROOSEVELT INSTITUTE

Our friends at the Roosevelt Institute are hiring a director of strategic initiatives to help lead government relations and communications strategy. This person will play an important role in helping the organization advance progressive policies to bring the legacy of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt into the 21st century.



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