Bringing Power Home

Reframing Place through the Lens of Class and Race

FRAME WORKS

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Acknowledgment and Gratitude

This work would not be possible without the guidance and collaboration of our advisory board. We extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation.

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Introduction

Across America, the places we live are deeply shaped by racial and economic injustice. Generations of working class communities, particularly Black and Indigenous communities, have a long history of organizing against these injustices—and winning—to change political and economic systems designed to extract wealth and resources from their communities.

As wealth and power have become more concentrated in the hands of a few, injustices across these communities have intensified. Yet there are real openings for large-scale collective action. People in these communities and Americans across groups—race, age, income, political party—increasingly recognize how power is concentrated in US society. This understanding is accompanied by a widespread desire for fundamental changes to our political and economic systems to give people power over their own lives.

Over the past two years, the FrameWorks Institute has collaborated closely with power-building leaders to identify a framing strategy, grounded in organizing experience, that organizers can use to step into these openings. The strategy that emerged from this collaboration exposes the systems driving injustice, builds understanding of how racism and capitalism work together to enable exploitation, and can mobilize collective action at scale.

This brief lays out this strategy, which has three pillars:

1. Explain how the system is designed to enable extraction from and exploitation of working-class communities, especially communities of color
2. Emphasize the community's power to fight back
3. Reimagine the community's future

By consistently structuring communications around these pillars, organizers can shift thinking in critical ways and motivate action.

This brief is accompanied by a toolbox for organizers that offers ready-to-use, hands-on tools for applying the strategy in daily organizing practice. While this framing strategy was primarily designed to support local organizing efforts, it is also effective with the general public and can be used in broader-based advocacy.

This brief is organized in four sections:

I. **Core Ideas.** We begin by summarizing the core ideas the framing strategy is designed to communicate.

II. **Research Methods and Sampling.** This section provides a brief overview of the research methods and describes how samples were constructed.

III. **Key Mindsets to Consider.** In this section, we review key cultural mindsets—the deep assumptions and tacit understandings that people use to think about the relationships between place, race, power, and policy. We highlight the mindsets that make it difficult to communicate about place-based injustices as well as some that are more productive.

IV. **The Framing Strategy.** The main section of the brief presents the three-pillared framing strategy, with specific recommendations for each pillar. We offer insights from the research as well as guidance on how to apply the frames in your own communications.

I. Core Ideas

The framing strategies in this brief are designed to communicate a core set of ideas. These ideas are grounded in a fundamental insight at the heart of racial and economic justice organizing: that injustices within and between communities are the result of larger political and economic structures, not isolated local failures.[1]

The current system extracts wealth.

The US economic system is currently built to extract wealth from the working class. This system ensures the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a few people and corporations.

Race is a construct and a tool of hierarchy.

Race is a social construct, not a biological reality. It was invented to create—and is perpetuated to maintain—a racial hierarchy that justifies extracting wealth and land from non-white communities. This hierarchy is continued through laws, policies, economic practices, and cultural norms that uphold white supremacy and shape Black, Brown, and Indigenous people's life chances today. These policies and practices have shifted over time but never disappeared.

Places are shaped by systems and policy.

The places people live are not shaped simply by natural market forces or residents' personal choices. They are deliberately designed through policy choices, including decisions about zoning, the upkeep of roads and public spaces, and where funding goes. These policies are shaped by the same political and economic systems that uphold racial hierarchies and enable extraction from non-white and working-class communities. This matters because where someone lives shapes their health, safety, education, and economic prospects, and the effects of past policy choices compound across generations, shaping the life chances of people today.

Collective action works.

Collective action has a long history of challenging—and winning against—the systems that were designed to exploit non-white and working-class communities in the United States. By organizing together to hold institutions accountable and demand policy change, communities can reshape the places they live.

[1] Here, we rely on the framework of racial capitalism. In the context of this project, the idea of racial capitalism helps to explain the interconnected problems of exploitation, extraction, resource deprivation, environmental destruction, and pollution in working-class communities—particularly communities of color—as the result of a system designed to accumulate and concentrate wealth in the hands of a powerful few. While it is worth noting racial capitalism is an animating framework for the project, the framing strategy we have developed is not designed to explain all aspects of racial capitalism and does not rely on the term.

II. Research Methods and Sampling

WHAT IS FRAMING?

Framing involves choices about how to present an issue—what to emphasize, how to explain it, and what to leave unsaid. These choices shape how people understand an issue, what they feel is important, and what changes seem possible. Frames aren't scripts or exact wording—they can be applied flexibly across different communications and messaging contexts.

The frames recommended in this brief were tested through a combination of experimental surveys and focus groups.

Because the framing strategy was designed primarily for use in organizing and power-building efforts, most research was conducted with members of communities impacted by place-based injustices. With the guidance of the advisory board, we developed a screening process to recruit participants from impacted communities. Screening questions covered issues such as the following:

- Availability and quality of resources and services, such as schools, health care, groceries, and transportation
- Perceived discrimination in public funding for the local community based on race or income
- Environmental injustices such as pollution exposure
- Policing disparities such as more frequent arrests, more frequent stop-and-searches, or police-enforced curfews.

Additional research was conducted with nationally representative samples to understand whether the framing strategy can also be used in advocacy with the broader public.

This brief is accompanied by a research methods supplement that contains a more detailed description of research methods, sampling, and research evidence supporting the recommendations.

III. Key Mindsets to Consider

In the first phase of research for this project, we identified deeply held cultural assumptions, or mindsets, that the public draws on to think about the relationship between policy, power, race, and place (for a fuller discussion, see The Terrain of Spatial Justice: Cultural Mindsets of Race and Place in the United States).

WHAT ARE CULTURAL MINDSETS? HOW DO MINDSETS DIFFER FROM PUBLIC OPINION?

Cultural mindsets (or mindsets, for short) are deep, assumed patterns of thinking that shape how we understand the world. In shaping how we think, mindsets give rise to our beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, and inform our decisions and behaviors.

In contrast to public opinion research, which tells us what people think about specific issues or policies, cultural mindsets research tells us how people think about an issue—the ways in which our implicit assumptions about the world shape how we make sense of issues, how we draw (or don't draw) connections between issues, and how we reason about needed solutions.

An important feature of cultural mindsets is that we all hold multiple, sometimes competing mindsets. What matters is the relative strength of these mindsets and how they are applied to the issue at hand.

1. **The *System Is Rigged*** cultural mindset is the understanding that, in the United States, a powerful few are rigging "the system" to benefit themselves at the expense of the many. This mindset is widely endorsed by members of the US public—across race, age, political party, income, and other demographics. While people share this basic understanding that systems are set up to benefit the powerful few, people often do not have a clear sense of who is rigging the system, who is being harmed, and how the system works. Depending on how these blanks are filled in, the mindset can be channeled in the direction of justice and democracy or toward racism, exclusion, and authoritarianism.
2. **The *Place Is Designed*** cultural mindset is grounded in the idea that places are designed and shaped by government policies. When people use this mindset, they recognize that what neighborhoods, cities, and other places are like, and who lives in them, is shaped by government decision-making.
3. **The *Character Shapes Place*** cultural mindset assumes that what places are like is a direct reflection of the people who live in them—"good" places are a reflection of "good" people, and "bad" places are a reflection of "bad" people. According to this way of thinking, neighborhoods that are safe, clean, and have close-knit communities are that way because the people who live there are "good" and "care" about their neighbors and the environment.

4. **The *Pathologizing Black Culture*** cultural mindset is grounded in the racist assumption that Black people share a dysfunctional culture with deficient values. This mindset is bound up with stereotypes of Black people as angry and violent, and is embedded in the toxic discourse about a supposed "culture of poverty" in predominantly Black urban communities. This mindset explains higher rates of poverty among Black people as a consequence of this "pathological" culture, obscuring the reality of structural racism and our country's long history of denying resources and opportunities to Black communities.
5. **The *Structural Model of Racism*** cultural mindset understands racism as built into US social systems and structures through policies and institutions, both past and present. When people think with this model, they recognize how the history of slavery and segregation continues to shape social systems, and they also understand that racism is perpetuated by current policies.
6. **The *Fatalism*** cultural mindset assumes that large social problems are unfixable. People often assume that systemic injustices are natural, inevitable, too big, or so long-standing that they cannot be changed. When relying on this way of thinking, people can feel hopeless and powerless, which prevents them from imagining the possibility of larger systemic changes.

All of these mindsets show up across groups, though different groups rely on them to different degrees and in different ways given differences in identity, political ideology, and lived experience. (See our previous report for more information.)

IV. The Framing Strategy

The framing strategy described here is grounded in organizers' experience. It emerged from deep collaboration with the advisory board. Advisory board members shared strategies that have worked for the field, and these strategies were taken up and tested as part of the research process. As findings emerged, the advisory board helped researchers make sense of them. The board offered critical guidance about how to integrate findings into a strategy that reflects and resonates with organizing experience and knowledge.

The following strategy represents the culmination of this collaborative research process. While many of the frames will be familiar, the process has provided key insights into how these frames can be used most effectively in the current context. This brief offers research-backed ways of sharpening communications that can help bring injustices into clearer view and motivate collective action.

As stated previously, there are three pillars to the framing strategy:

1. Explain how the system is designed to extract from and exploit working-class communities, especially communities of color
2. Emphasize the community's power to fight back
3. Reimagine the community's future

LEVERAGING THE *SYSTEM IS RIGGED* MINDSET

The strategy leverages openings created by the *System Is Rigged* mindset. People understand that systems are set up to benefit a few at the expense of the many, but they often do not have a clear sense of the details. Without an explicit understanding of the system and how it can change, and without a sense of collective power, *System Is Rigged* thinking can lead people to feel like the problems we face as a society are too big to fix.

The frames recommended next fill in the blanks of the *System Is Rigged* mindset. Filling in these blanks opens up space for people to think about systems and power, understand systemic racism, and support collective action.

These frames explain how US systems are set up in unjust and harmful ways. They emphasize that human decisions create and maintain current systems, which opens up the possibility for change. By explaining who benefits from systems and who profits from them, these frames place responsibility for creating and maintaining injustice on the powerful few, rather than blaming working-class communities and communities of color themselves. Finally, these frames offer solutions that match the scale of the problem and emphasize collective power. By leveraging and channeling the recognition that the system is rigged, the frames strengthen understanding of racism and capitalism and build demand for change.

These strategies share key features with narratives that have proven successful on related issues, including work and labor, democracy, the political system, and the tax system. Across these issues, framing that engages the *System Is Rigged* mindset helps build support for systemic change. In other briefs, we've recommended using the specific phrase "the system is rigged" as part of the framing strategy. Here, we recommend ways of leveraging the *System Is Rigged* mindset that don't require using that phrase.

Pillar 1: Explain how the system is designed to extract from and exploit working-class communities, especially communities of color.

This pillar focuses on key aspects of systemic racism and capitalism—specifically, *how* the social invention of race is used to justify extraction of wealth and resources. By explaining how the system is designed to create inequalities, communicators can shift blame onto the systems of power and away from impacted communities. By emphasizing *design*—the fact that systems were created through human decisions—this strategy makes it clear these inequalities are not natural or inevitable, and opens up the possibility for change.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Use the language of extraction—both literal and figurative—to explain how systems take from communities.

Use the idea of extraction to talk about how our current system makes it possible for value, resources, and services to be pulled out of communities, profiting the wealthy few at the community's expense. Highlight that working-class communities and communities of color should keep their local resources, as well as the value and wealth that they create.

Describe extraction first in literal, concrete terms, talking about natural resources that are taken from communities through activities like mining, drilling, and fracking. Then use extraction as a metaphor to talk about other issues—for example, wealthy people and corporations taking away good jobs or extracting our time and energy for low pay.

> **Examples:**
> "For years, out-of-state developers have **extracted value** from our community."
>
> "Corporations are **draining the tax base** to build warehouses and pad their own pockets **instead of investing** in our clinics and schools."
>
> "We demand council members **keep our community's resources *in* our community**."

What It Does

- The *Extraction* frame increases the belief among people of color living in impacted communities that local political action will be effective at making change.
- This frame helps people who live in impacted communities understand the way policy choices shape places, and moves people toward understanding that segregation is the result of policy choices.
- Among Democrats who report living in impacted communities, the *Extraction* frame reduces the assumption that issues in Black communities are based on community failures.
- Instead, these same Democrats are moved toward more structural understandings of how policy choices shape communities and the opportunities that are available within them.

Why It Works

The *Extraction* frame provides a concrete way of explaining place-based injustice, bringing together a wide range of issues under a single idea. By bringing power and profit clearly into view, the frame clarifies that the people extracting from the community—not the people in the community itself—are actually responsible for problems. For people within impacted communities, the frame brings into view the possibility of challenging unjust systems and building community power.

The frame makes that possibility concrete by contrasting the current status quo with a clear alternative in which resources, services, and value stay in working-class communities. This contrast reveals the choices that have shaped how local communities are designed and makes clear that different choices—ones that keep value in communities—are possible.

Sample communication with tips for putting this recommendation to use:

For generations, **resources** created in Millbrook—our labor, our land, the wealth we build every single day—have been **extracted like ore from a hillside**. These assets **should be kept here, not shuttled off in trucks** bound for someone else's balance sheet. Right now, a handful of corporate developers and absentee landlords have used their lobbying and outsize influence **to drill straight into our community**: literally **fracking** under our water table, but also **strip-mining our paychecks** down to poverty wages, **siphoning off tax dollars** meant for our schools, and **hollowing out the housing and health care** we depend on. It doesn't have to be this way. Millbrook has more than enough to go around if it isn't **constantly being drained** by people who don't even live here. So join Millbrook United this Thursday because **organizing is how we shut off the pipeline** and make sure **what we create actually stays where it was made**—right here, with us.

How to Use It

Connect to the shared belief that resources should stay in working-class communities. Make it clear that taking resources away from communities is wrong.

Situate villains within systems. Say that right now policies and systems are set up to allow a wealthy and powerful few to extract from our communities.

Highlight the literal extraction of natural resources. Name things like drilling, mining, and fracking.

Use terms like "taking away" and "stealing" to figuratively extend the idea of extraction. For example, name how low-paying jobs are "stealing" our time and energy.

Emphasize that communities could have what they need. Explain that the places we live could have more than enough without these extractive systems.

Call for action to resist extraction. Call on community members to organize and work together to make sure the wealth and resources stay with the communities that create them and are not extracted for profit.

AVOID USING POLLUTION AS THE FRAME

In focus groups, we compared the Extraction frame with a Pollution frame that talked about both literal pollution and other ways that corporations "pollute" by adding unwanted or harmful things to the community. The Pollution frame made it hard for participants to see the role of systems and led them to focus on individual blame and responsibility.

Pollution can also bring to mind ideas of contamination and disgust, which can lead to unproductive associations. When participants used pollution as a metaphor, some applied the idea to things like homelessness and crime.

It is helpful to name processes that pollute, like drilling, mining, and fracking, but it is best to frame them as forms of extraction so that people can easily connect these processes to other forms of injustice.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Use history to explain how race is constructed and how it has been used to concentrate power.

Describe how and why race was constructed—to let wealthy white people take wealth and power. Explain that race was created to justify the exploitation and dispossession of Native peoples, Black people, and some immigrant groups. Connect this history to ongoing economic exploitation. Call for an end to racial hierarchies and emphasize that we can remake society to work for everyone.

> **Examples:**
>
> "Racial categories were invented, and even codified into law, by wealthy elites seeking to rationalize their exploitation of working folks struggling to make ends meet. In other words, ICE is following a tired old playbook."
>
> "Wealthy property holders built their fortunes on land stolen from Native nations and labor stolen from enslaved Black people. That wealth was never returned—in fact, it has been earning interest ever since."
>
> "The same redlining maps drawn in 1938 still shape who gets loans in our city today. That's not an accident—our system was designed to concentrate wealth."

What It Does

- The Historical Explanation frame increases the general public's understanding that places are designed and shaped through policy choices.
- This frame builds the general public's understanding that policies have produced inequality in the opportunities available to people, and it helps people see that racial segregation is the result of policy.
- This frame helps the general public understand that race is a social construction and was created to produce hierarchies between people.

Why It Works

Talking about the historical creation of race and racial hierarchies helps people recognize that race—and our society's ways of approaching race—are the result of collective choices. By explaining how race and racial hierarchies were created, it helps people see that they aren't natural or inevitable. Highlighting the unjust purposes behind this historical invention strengthens the conviction that this ongoing injustice must be addressed.

Appealing to this history has long been part of organizing strategy and success. This research indicates that it remains a powerful and effective approach today while offering insights into the most effective points to stress when telling this story.

Sample communication with tips for putting this recommendation to use:

Race is a classification system that was invented, deliberately, centuries ago to sort people into categories that justify exploiting some so others get rich. Wealthy property owners built their fortunes through this type of theft. They stole land from Native nations and labor from enslaved Black people, using racial hierarchy as rationalization. That system of racial exploitation didn't end with slavery—for decades afterward, Black, Native, and other people of color across this country were explicitly denied access to housing and health care, blocked from attending schools, and locked out of the good-paying jobs an education could have opened up. We can draw a straight line from those policies to the low-wage jobs so many families are still stuck in today. But this can change. WE can change it. We can defy those hierarchies by creating policy solutions to finally repair the harm. What harmful policies have taken away, organizing and community solidarity will win back. Let's return investment to the ZIP codes it was taken from and make sure all of our neighbors have access to the resources we need to thrive.

How to Use It

Explain how racial categories were made up to produce hierarchies. Explain that these categories were invented, how they group people based on various characteristics, and how they allow for unfair treatment.

Show the ways that racial hierarchies allow for wealth accumulation. Talk about how racial hierarchies were created to allow a few wealthy white people to take land from Indigenous people, enslave Black people, and exploit people of color.

Give examples of racist systems and policies. Provide examples that connect past policy to ongoing exploitation—for example, by explaining how people of color are still exploited in low-wage jobs.

Emphasize that society can be reconstructed. Explain that it does not need to be this way, that we can remake society to work for us all by doing away with racial hierarchies.

Match solutions to the scale of the problem. A systemic problem should be matched with systemic solutions. For example, talk about solutions that restore wealth and land to Black and Indigenous communities, and ensure that everyone has income, housing, and health care.

IT CAN BE HELPFUL TO GIVE EXAMPLES OF PAST WINS

One way to bring history into the conversation is to offer examples of communities organizing and winning. Highlighting examples of wins can build a sense that communities can work together to make change.

Examples should include a clear description of the issue at stake and offer a concrete description of how communities organized, persisted, and won. Make explicit that this is an example of how organizing with our neighbors can lead to communities having more control over what happens to them.

One example, shared by a traditional Menominee organizer and advisory board member, is the Menominee Nation's organized resistance to the termination of their tribal status and seizure of their land. Explaining how the tribe organized, went to Congress, demanded change, and forced Congress to restore their tribal status and land demonstrates the power of communities working together to reshape systems.

Pillar 2: Emphasize the community's power to fight back.

This pillar highlights the power of communities to change systems and resist extraction and exploitation. Emphasizing the community's power can build a sense of urgency, motivating people to act. The frames under this pillar do this in different ways, drawing on strategies that organizers have long used to foster a sense of shared purpose and move people to action.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Talk about *Community Joy* as a source of *Community Power*.

Affirm the joy that communities hold and sustain even in the face of unjust systems. Emphasize that this joy is a source of power—power to organize together and resist the wealthy few who take key resources away from communities.

> **Examples:**
> "Maximize **joy**. Mobilize **power**."
>
> "You can't pass by the Douglass Park splash pad on a summer afternoon without hearing the **happy squeals** of young swimmers and **feeling the community joy**. The city council wanted to pave it over to install a parking garage, but we joined together to shut that idea down. Turns out our **joy is our superpower too**."
>
> "We are **joyful**. We demand justice. We know our **strength**. We will be free."

What It Does

- When paired, the values of *Community Joy* and *Community Power* move people living in impacted communities away from blaming Black communities for the injustices they experience.
- These values help people in communities impacted by systemic injustice understand that policies have produced segregation.

- These values increase the belief among people directly impacted by unjust local systems that organizing locally is possible and can create change.

Why It Works

The value of *Community Joy* fosters solidarity by foregrounding the community's inherent worth and resilience in the face of injustice. This frame contrasts the community's joy with the harm caused by systems that prioritize profit. Communicators can emphasize that joy is enduring while also noting that resources like clean air and water, abundant housing, and green spaces can help joy flourish. By stressing power rooted in joy, this frame builds a sense that change is possible and helps move people to action.

Sample communication with tips for putting this recommendation to use:

The sounds of singing and solidarity emanating from the Coulter Street community center spread joy and resistance to porches, playgrounds, and businesses across town. Like we've always done, we're standing strong together against harmful outside influences and saying NO to the proposed recycling plant. We don't accept that Black and Brown families on the East Side should be forced to breathe polluted air while the wealthy white developers who profit live miles away. We know that people in positions of power have routinely sold us out for a quick buck, but we understand our own strength and collective resolve too. We've been here before. We have the song sheets, and we know the lyrics. With your voice, we'll sing even louder this time. Come organize with East Side Rising—we lead with joy and practice our power at the Coulter Street community center every Friday night.

How to Use It

Lead with joy and name it as a source of power. Make it clear that joy persists through oppression and mistreatment. Talk about how joy gives communities power.

Name who attempts to undermine community joy. Talk about how a wealthy few and corporations attempt to control what happens in communities, at the community's expense.

Point to material impacts. For example, talk about polluted air and water, development that destroys green space, and the construction of commercial space and highways where housing should be.

Link policy choices to power. Argue that things are this way because of choices made over time by those with power. Be clear that these choices were not made by the community.

Call for action rooted in community power-building. Emphasize that communities can use their power to force corporations and politicians to back down. Call on community members to organize and demand more control over what happens in their communities.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Use the metaphor *Fight* to show that organizing can win.

Talk about community organizing as a fight against a wealthy and powerful few who benefit from the way our systems are set up. Emphasize that if we band together in large numbers, we can force them to back down and win changes that will help the community.

> **Examples:**
>
> "We've **battled** worthier **opponents** and **won**. We can **defeat** the corporations driving out our local businesses too!"
>
> "FarmCo processing plants **have been beating us down** for far too long, but they don't hold the community power—we do. Riverbend Food Workers Union is becoming **a force to be reckoned with.**"
>
> "Unite. **Fight.** Win."

What It Does

- For people in impacted communities, the *Fight* metaphor increases the belief that they could advocate and organize to make change in their community, even in hostile conditions.
- In contrast, the *Voice* metaphor *does not* increase their belief that they could advocate and organize to make changes in their communities.

Why It Works

This metaphor helps people see the power of acting together, giving them a sense that with enough numbers, they can win. It focuses on power struggles, emphasizing that political conflict is necessary to win the changes communities want.

In experimental testing, the *Fight* metaphor proved to be much more effective than the other common metaphor for political action: *Voice*. Focus groups offered insight into why this is the case. In focus group discussions, participants defaulted to a *Voice* metaphor to describe political engagement and voting in particular—speaking up, making ourselves heard, having a say. But when people spoke with more urgency and intensity, they often switched metaphors, shifting to talk about a *Fight*.

The *Voice* metaphor implies that political action is about expression and communication. This leads people to assume that the most that can be done is raise awareness or express dissent. The *Fight* metaphor, by contrast, is people's go-to alternative when they want to convey action, conflict, and taking matters into their own hands. While a *Voice* can be easily ignored, a *Fight* carries urgency and has material consequences.

Sample communication with tips for putting this recommendation to use:

Make no mistake—we're **fighting for our lives**, our families, and our future, and we WILL win. Right now, a handful of slumlords and their allies on the zoning board **have us on the ropes, controlling what happens** on our streets from boardrooms far away. What they don't realize is that we've been gearing up for this, and we have no intention of backing down.

The outcome isn't decided yet. **Every round** is still up for grabs, and the only way to prevail is if we **show up swinging**. What's at stake is whether our kids grow up with clean water, safe playgrounds, and quality schools, or whether **we keep taking hits** and calling it normal.

Here's our advantage: They might have the money, but we have the numbers, and **numbers are what win battles like this one**. One tenant standing alone gets knocked down easily, but 300 tenants **throwing punches together** is a different story entirely. So here's our game plan. First, we pack Tuesday's city council meeting until the room can't hold another soul. Next, we sign the petition circulating through every building on the block. And if that still doesn't **make them tap out**, we organize a rent strike and **keep the pressure on** until **they admit defeat**.

We didn't start this fight. But we're going to finish it.

How to Use It

Emphasize that the fight is winnable. Stress that if the community fights, it can win.

Define the stakes. What's at stake is communities having what they need and deciding what happens in their community.

Place the opponent within the arena of systems. Talk about communities battling for what they need against a wealthy and powerful few who are enabled by our political and economic systems.

Emphasize that things don't have to be this way—we can change them. This can motivate people in ways that overcome fatalism.

Talk about power in numbers. Highlight that if we organize together in large numbers, we can force the wealthy and powerful to back down.

Give concrete examples of actions and possible wins. Offer specifics about the kinds of actions people can take and what victory could look like.

Pillar 3: Reimagine the community's future.

This pillar focuses on helping people imagine a better future for their community, pivoting from the problems and conflicts of the past and present to aspirations for what's possible. By giving people a vision of the future, this pillar moves people beyond the problem toward action and transformative change.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Contrast positive and negative visions of the future to show why community action is both possible and necessary.

Ask people to vividly imagine living in the near future. Describe them moving through a world where their local communities have gained concrete resources and services as the result of community organizing. Contrast this vision of the world with one where things get worse and communities have even less of what they need. Present the choice between these two futures, and emphasize that by organizing, making demands, and taking action, the community can create a better future.

> **Examples:**
> "Picture Church Street in five years with bustling restaurants and new playgrounds—or picture it boarded up. Which future we get depends on whether we organize today."
>
> "Thriving or just surviving. The choice is ours."
>
> "We can stay silent and watch test scores fall, or we can demand upgraded facilities, improved curricula, and a better education for our kids."

What It Does

- This *Future Visions* frame helped people living in communities impacted by systemic injustices feel more efficacious in local organizing to benefit their community.
- For participants of color living in communities directly impacted by systemic injustice, this frame increased the belief that they can organize with others and work together to create change in their communities.

Why It Works

Vividly imagining a better world helps people in impacted communities overcome *Fatalism*, showing that change is possible and that organizing is the path to get there. Contrasting positive and negative outcomes adds a sense of urgency and choice, putting the future in people's hands and motivating action.

Sample communication with tips for putting this recommendation to use:

Imagine it's five years from now and you're walking down Fifth Avenue on a Saturday morning. You pass the new community health clinic, its waiting room full of neighbors getting checkups they can actually afford. Kids are shouting and laughing in the renovated playground at Douglass Park. The old warehouse on the corner is now affordable apartments, and the corner store that almost closed is thriving because rents were finally brought down. None of this happened on its own. It's the direct result of Fifth Ward Organizing attending city council meetings, holding the zoning board accountable, and refusing to back down.

Now imagine that same walk if we hadn't organized. The clinic closed years ago; the nearest one is a two-hour bus ride away. The playground is fenced off, still waiting on repairs promised a decade ago. Rent on the block has doubled, and half the storefronts are empty.

Which Fifth Avenue we live in five years from now isn't decided yet—it's a choice we make together. Join us next week: We're packing the town hall to demand officials share their latest clinic renovation plans, including which companies are getting the contracts and how our tax dollars are being used. This is our clinic, our community, and our future. Hope to see you there!

How to Use It

Lead with a vision of the community where conditions have improved. Starting with hope and imagination helps open people up to the possibility of change.

Help people imagine themselves in this future by using second-person point of view. For example, you can ask people to imagine themselves walking down the street in their community in a future when it has undergone major changes.

Describe in concrete terms what the future community looks like. For example, ask people to imagine hearing kids play in a new park, walking past well-funded schools, and seeing newly built affordable housing.

Attribute this future to community organizing. Make it clear that this future was made possible by the community coming together and organizing for change.

Contrast this with a negative vision of the future. Ask people to imagine that the community has not organized, and things have gotten worse. Be just as vivid and continue to use second-person point of view. For example, talk about passing the same school, but in this alternate future, it is underfunded and short on teachers and supplies. Local businesses have closed or moved elsewhere, and the jobs that remain are low paying.

Offer the choice between these two worlds. Make it clear that we have a collective choice about whether to live in a future where communities thrive or where they struggle.

Conclusion

Across US society, more people are recognizing a basic truth: Our economy and our politics have been rigged by a wealthy and powerful few at the expense of everyone else. This growing awareness creates space to reframe how we talk about race, place, and class.

But when the details are missing—which systems are responsible, who holds the power, who bears the harm, and what should change—people can fill in those blanks with assumptions that don't serve their community. The good news is that the right framing can fill in the blanks with clarity instead of confusion, and this new understanding can motivate community action to bring about change.

This brief offers a framing strategy built for this moment. The strategy, which grew out of a collaboration between an advisory board of organizers and FrameWorks' researchers and strategists, brings together field expertise and insights from research. It rests on three pillars.

1. Explain how the system is designed to extract from and exploit working-class communities, especially communities of color. Communicators can connect place-based inequalities to unjust systems by using the language of extraction and offering historical explanations of how race—and racial hierarchies—were created.
2. Emphasize the community's power to fight back. By appealing to the values of *Community Joy* and *Community Power* and by using the *Fight* metaphor, communicators can evoke the source and potential impact of building power.
3. Reimagine the community's future. Contrasting positive and negative futures brings home the possibility—and the urgency—of change.

Together, these pillars build an understanding of how systemic racism and capitalism create place-based exploitation and extraction and move people toward collective action.

Endnotes

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Bringing Power Home

Reframing Place through the Lens of Class and Race

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