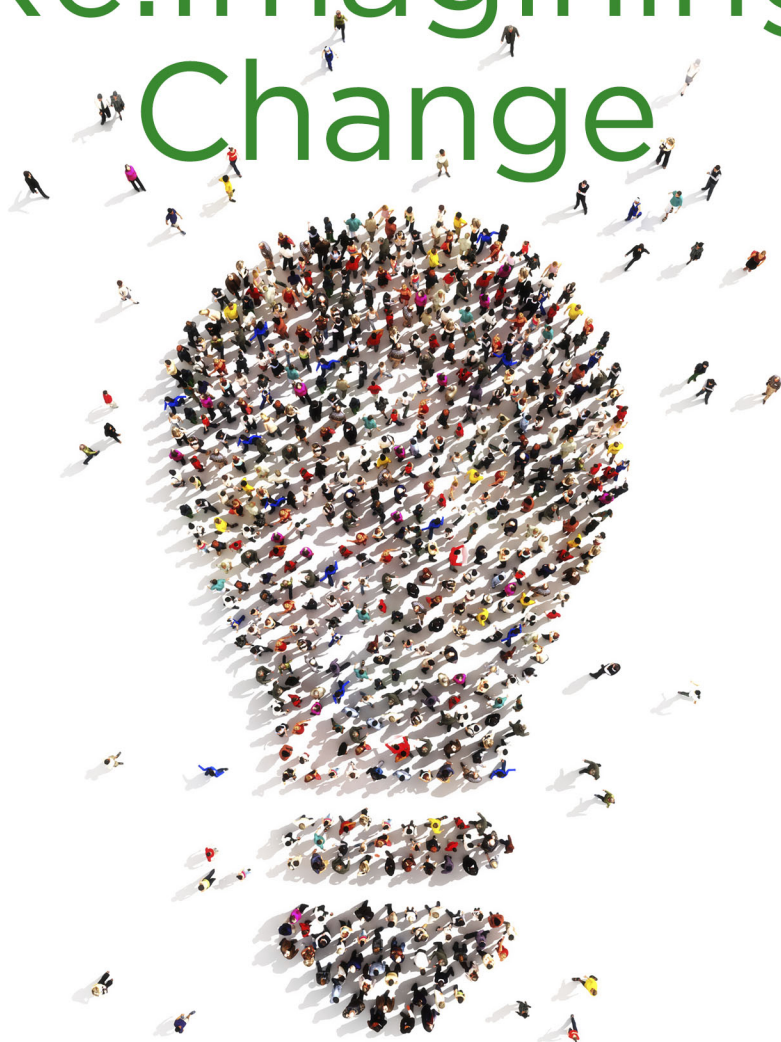


"All around us the old stories are failing, crumbling in the face of lived experience and scientific reality. But what stories will replace them? That is the subject of this crucial book: helping readers to tell irresistible stories about deep change." —**NAOMI KLEIN**

Re:Imagining Change



How to use story-based strategy
to win campaigns, build movements,
and change the world

Patrick Reinsborough & Doyle Canning

Foreword by Jonathan Matthew Smucker

UPDATED AND EXPANDED 2ND EDITION

*Re:Imagining Change—How to Use Story-based Strategy to Win Campaigns,
Build Movements, and Change the World*

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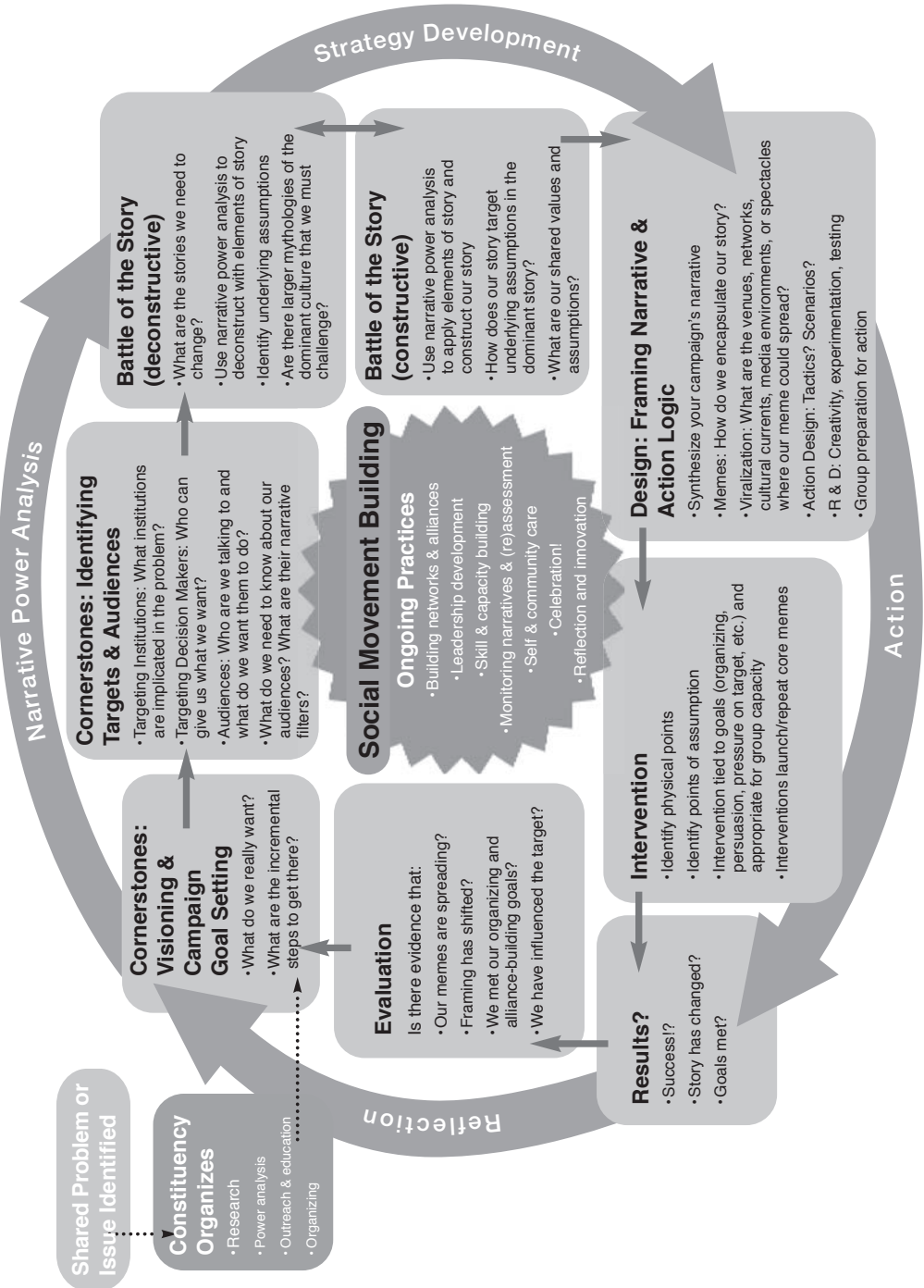
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Story-based Strategy Campaign Model



For specific tools & resources visit: storybasedstrategy.org

F.R.A.M.E.S. NARRATIVE CHECKLIST

How do you know if you've created a good framing narrative? Compare it to this handy checklist,²⁷ because an effective narrative F.R.A.M.E.S. the issue.

F = Frame the Issue

Does your narrative set the terms for understanding the issue? Does it reinforce the vision and values that you are promoting? Framing means defining the problem: explaining what's at stake and defining the solution. Don't communicate your tactics—what you are doing—but rather *why* you are doing it.

R = Reframe Opponent's Story and Reinforce Your Frame

Make sure your narrative is not just reiterating your opponent's frame. Reframing means changing the terms of the debate on the issue: Does your narrative elevate new characters, redefine the issue with different values, or expose a faulty assumption of your opponent?

A = Accessible to the Audience

Will your narrative work for the audience(s) you are trying to persuade? Is it presented with language, context and values that will be appealing to them? Your narrative should always be factual, but it may need to be tailored. Finding the right messengers to deliver the message can help make it credible.

M = Meme

Can you encapsulate your narrative's core messages into effective memes? They need to be memorable, easy to spread, and sticky. Is there a powerful metaphor that captures the essence of the issue? Is there an existing meme that you can reference or remix, such as a popular catchphrase or well-known idea? Paragraphs don't spread, but phrases do. If you aren't distilling your narrative into core memes you risk letting your opposition's memes define you.

E = Emotional

People don't swing into action because of a pie chart. An effective narrative should connect to real-world impacts and speak in the language of values. Engage your audience's emotions with themes like hope, anger, tragedy, and determination. Humor (as long as it strikes the right tone) can be a powerful way to make your narrative memorable.

S = Simple and Short

This doesn't mean dumb down your narrative, it means, get to the core essence of the issue. Why does it matter to your audience? As journalists say, "Don't bury the lead!" Or less famously, "Simplify, then exaggerate."²⁸



Narrative Power

2.1. Truth vs. Meaning

Politics is that dimension of social life in which things become true if enough people believe them.

—David Graeber

We live in a world defined by stories. They come in all shapes and sizes: mundane anecdotes, Hollywood blockbusters, prepackaged “news” stories, cherished childhood memories, religious stories conveying ancient lessons. . . . A story can unite or divide people(s), obscure issues or spotlight new perspectives. A story can inform or deceive, enlighten, or entertain, even do all of the above. Stories are the threads of our lives and the fabric of human cultures. But how does narrative power actually work?

We absorb stories from many sources: family, personal experience, the media, and religious, cultural, and educational institutions. Some stories we learn consciously while others are just part of the cultural background. These stories teach us how society functions and create a sense of shared culture and identity. The most powerful of these stories operate as contemporary mythologies.

Lesson one in narrative power: myth is meaning. Don't be limited by the common pejorative use of “myth” to mean “lie” and miss the deeper relevance of mythology as a framework for shared meaning. Myths are often mistakenly dismissed as folktales from long ago describing fantastical realities, but even today a sea of stories tell us who we are, what to believe, and toward what we should aspire. These stories play the same role that myths always have: answering fundamental questions of identity, origin, and worldview. Today we may be less likely to believe that the sun is pulled across the sky by a god in a chariot, but many people are



Humans are the narrative animal, so when we look at the night sky we naturally connect the dots to create meaning.

perfectly willing to believe a specific personal care product will make us more beautiful, or accept the claims that their country is “exceptional,” superior or even specially favored by God.

As the narrative animal, we use story to structure the patterns we observe around us. Take the example of the night sky. In the illustration above you see an image that you probably recognize. Were you taught a name for this grouping of stars?¹ Different cultures have given it different names: the Plough, the Wagon, the Great Bear, the Saucepan, and frequently, different versions of the Big Dipper.

But is there really a giant saucepan in the sky?

Of course not (at least we don't think so?), but that's not the point. The stories used to map constellations helped our ancestors make sense of the night sky and pass down practical skills like finding the North Star to navigate at night. Different cultures connect the dots to see the shapes associated with their own stories, but across the world, people looked to the sky and created myths that gave them meaning.

The Big Dipper is a simple example, but it shows us a critical aspect of narrative power: the difference between truth and meaning. Meaning doesn't just exist in the world waiting to be discovered, rather meaning is produced by human interpretation as we translate it into language (what cultural theorists call “representation”²). The power of the story does not derive from its factual truth but rather from the story's ability to provide meaning. Narrative is one of the primary ways we humans create meaning in the world.

Understanding the complicated relationship between truth and meaning is the foundation of story-based strategy.

Too often progressives think that just because a story is factually true, it will be meaningful to our audiences, and therefore build our power. But the reality is just the opposite: If a story is meaningful to people, they will believe that it is true. *The currency of narrative is not truth but rather meaning.* In other words, there is no inherent connection between the power of a story and whether or not the content is objectively true. After

all, if having the facts on your side was enough to win, we would live in a very different world.

Narrative power manifests as a fight over how to make meaning. We often believe in a story not because it is factually true but because it connects with our values or is relevant to our experiences in a way that is compelling. Having the facts on your side is only the first step toward winning, because the facts alone are not enough to transform understanding and reshape meaning in people's hearts and minds.

Thus people fighting for a better world need to take our truths—about injustice, racism, environmental destruction, or whatever issue we are working on—and make them *meaningful* to the people we are trying to reach. Story-based strategy is not an invitation to ignore or distort the facts but rather a recognition that to be persuasive you need to use the power of story to make the most important facts matter.

THE ETHICS OF STORY-BASED STRATEGY

"But wait!" Some people in our trainings have protested at this truth vs. meaning ah-ha moment, asking, "Does that mean we can just say anything we want, or just lie to make the best story? Doesn't that make us just as manipulative as 'them'?" The answer—which is essential to how we implement story-based strategy in the real world—is YES and NO.

Yes: Some of the most powerful, meaningful stories animating popular culture are in fact lies. Unscrupulous power-holders have always exploited this distinction between truth and meaning to manipulate and control through well-crafted deceit. So, yes you can fabricate your story, but NO, you shouldn't.

This book does not advocate lying. Primarily because the facts do matter when it comes to real-world impact and lying is unethical. Secondly, because in the long-term lying isn't very effective. Lies are narrative power at its most crude and, therefore, vulnerable. People are smart and if they discover a story they trusted is actually a deliberate lie, your story-based strategy will fail: belief implodes, the story's power is negated and an audience of former supporters become adversaries. Of course, the corollary to this is that the more people believe something, the less likely are mere facts to convince them that it is not true, but we will come to that in Section 2.11. So it's a matter of both ethics and goals. If your ethics and goals are aligned for a greater good, then using strategic storytelling does not make you "as bad as them." Base your story in the facts. If the facts aren't on your side, something is wrong and you need to reexamine what you are doing. The story-based strategy approach is meant for practitioners who are deeply grounded in transparent values, accountable to specific communities, and fighting for a more just, democratic, and ecologically sane future.³ If you want to use this book's insights on narrative power for personal gain, manipulation, or to exploit others, then please stop reading now. We'd offer you your money back but we suspect, given your ethically flexible worldview, you probably have plenty of opportunities for a lucrative career.

2.4 Setting the Frame

Power intervenes in discourse to fix meaning.
—Stuart Hall

One of the most important concepts when applying a narrative power analysis is to understand framing. Cognitive research tells us that our brains interpret the world by relying heavily on preexisting conceptual models known as frames. Frames are how we process and mentally organize what we encounter in the world around us. In the words of journalism professor Stephen Reese, “Frames are the organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”¹⁰

The roots of the modern framing discourse are in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman and his 1974 book, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Goffman called frames “schemata of interpretation.”¹¹ Framing became a buzzword, in progressive circles, thanks in large part to the popularity of cognitive linguist George Lakoff’s important work.¹² But it’s important to clarify that framing is not merely about coming up with a catchy slogan or magic words. Framing is harnessing the underlying narrative power that makes certain words have seemingly magic impact: the power of shaping collective interpretation.¹³



(Left) Associated Press. “A young man walks through chest-deep floodwater after *looting* a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005.”

(Right) AFP/Getty Images/Chris Graythen. “Two residents waded through chest-deep water after *finding* bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area in New Orleans, Louisiana.” *Emphasis added.*

From a story-based strategy perspective, framing is one of the most fundamental applications of narrative power. Framing is critical to understanding narrative power because by defining the structure and boundaries of the story, the frame defines point of view and power. Framing a story means setting the terms for how to understand it and what it means. Like the frame around a piece of art or the edges of the television screen, the frame focuses and organizes our attention—incoming information is

rendered meaningful and thereby resonates with and motivates the audience. The audience makes meaning from what is inside the frame, while what is outside the frame is ignored, thus defining what is part of the story versus what is not. As media researcher Charlotte Ryan explains, “A frame is a thought organizer, highlighting certain events and facts as important, and rendering

Framing is critical to understanding narrative power because the frame defines point of view and power in the story.

others invisible.”¹⁴ This interplay of power and representation is the essence of framing and what makes it such a critical tool for story-based strategy.

The example documented in the two photos on the previous page compares two different media reports covering the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina hitting New Orleans in 2005. The context of surviving in the devastated city and the specific action of taking food from damaged stores is identical, but white people are described as “finding” resources at a local grocery store, while a Black youth is described as “looting.” In this case the framing difference is only one word, but it creates a completely different narrative and therefore meaning.

The power of a frame is to invoke a whole set of preexisting stories and assumptions about the world. “Finding” suggests the type of sympathetic resourcefulness needed to survive in the midst of a disaster. The word “looting,” however, invokes a long-standing racist narrative that has become painfully familiar through hundreds of years of dehumanizing and criminalizing people of color in the United States.

This example shows the life or death stakes of how people and issues are framed. If the U.S. government says that you are “finding” they send the National Guard to rescue you, but if they decide you are “looting” they send the National Guard to shoot you. But an equally important lesson in framing is provided by the pairing of these two images. This side-by-side comparison told a new story exposing racist media coverage and fueling organizing around media justice.¹⁵

2.7 Power and Mythology

Myths, which are believed in, tend to become true.

—George Orwell

Just as activists apply a power analysis to understand avenues of influence between key decision-makers and relevant institutions, we can apply a narrative power analysis to understand the narratives operating around an issue, campaign or broader social context.

It is almost impossible to miss coercive power in its physical manifestations (military invasions, mass incarceration, state surveillance, firing workers who organize, etc.), but it is much harder to see when power is operating as narrative. Certain types of narratives act like glue holding the status quo together: the power to marginalize critics; the power to normalize suffering by blaming the victimized for their own oppression; the power to legitimize structural violence and rationalize injustice. For example, when forced to acknowledge an injustice, some people will shrug it off, saying “that’s just the way things are” or “life isn’t fair,” instead of seeing the oppressive structure of the system. Framing popular narratives is as critical to maintaining social control as fighter planes, police batons, and economic coercion.

In the 1930s, the imprisoned Italian Communist leader Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of **hegemony** (coming from the Greek word *hegemonia*, meaning leadership) to explain this idea. He described how elites don’t just rule society with the force of state and economic power, but more importantly, they control society’s moral and intellectual leadership. Capitalism, Gramsci argued, maintained control not just through violence and economic coercion, but also ideologically,



Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), an Italian Communist leader imprisoned by Mussolini, contributed many important ideas to modern political thought, including the concept of “hegemony.”

through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the elite became the “common sense” values of all.³⁰ The power of hegemony is expressed through the subtle coercion of “manufacturing consent” rather than only with armed force.³¹ This multifaceted cultural process limits the terms of acceptable debate to make ideas that challenge the status quo almost *unthinkable*.

Hegemony operates in cultural stories that over time gain widespread acceptance and reinforce a dominant perspective or worldview. These webs of narratives are **control mythologies**, which shape a shared sense of political reality, normalize the status quo, and obscure alternative options or visions.

As we discussed in Section 2.1, referring to these stories as “mythologies” is not about whether they are true or false, because that’s not what makes them powerful; rather it is about how much meaning they carry in the culture. Like religious mythologies (both ancient and contemporary), these stories are powerful in that they give people a lens for interpreting and understanding the world. Some control mythologies evolve over time carrying harmful assumptions of hegemonic culture, while others are specifically designed by unscrupulous power-holders for their own political purposes.

From the notion that “you can’t fight city hall” to the idea that our economies must always “grow,” control mythologies often operate as the boundaries of political imagination and influence the dominant culture. By identifying and analyzing control mythologies, we can develop a better understanding of how power operates and expand our own sense of what is politically possible.

2.8 People-Power and Narrative

The power of the people is much stronger than the people in power.
—Wael Ghonim

Oftentimes, when stories about history or the way society operates are shared, they are framed as if politicians, generals, police officers, and corporate executives have power but the rest of us don’t. This is a common control mythology that normalizes existing power dynamics and makes them appear fixed in place and unchangeable.

Fortunately, people-powered movements around the world have shown us that power is a malleable and dynamic relationship between those who have more power and those who have less. The “social view of power,” (sometimes called the “consent theory of power” as in the

2.11 Narrative Filters

Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted . . . because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn't fit with the core belief.

—Frantz Fanon

Have you ever tried to convince people (who didn't already agree with you) about a social issue by telling them “the facts”? Did you tell them all the statistics and data about your cause—maybe even point them toward a comprehensive report your organization has done on the issue—and they still didn't change their mind? You're not alone.⁴³ Applying a narrative power analysis can help us understand these common dynamics and inform our strategy to reach people with a specific message.

Around most issues, it is easy to define the problem as “the general public doesn't know the facts.” Oftentimes, activists assume that if we could just inform people about the issue and give them the information they are lacking, then they will join our campaigns for change. But, in most cases, “the facts” alone are not enough to persuade; assumptions, emotions, internal narratives, and preexisting attitudes can get in the way of the facts making sense. In the words of infamous Republican pollster Frank Luntz, “It's not what you say, it's what people hear.”

A narrative power analysis helps us see the larger problem is not necessarily what people *don't* know. Rather, the problem may be what they *do* know. In other words, people have existing stories about their world that act as **narrative filters** to prevent them from hearing social change messages. As years of psychological study have shown us, people are conditioned to ignore information that doesn't fit into their existing framework for understanding the world (often called “confirmation bias”).⁴⁴ These biases are deep enough that we can even track our neurological pathways of denial. As Drew Weston explains in his book, *The Political Brain*:

When confronted with potentially troubling political information, a network of neurons becomes active that produces distress. . . . The brain registers the conflict between data and desire and begins to search for ways to turn off the spigot of unpleasant emotion.⁴⁵

Information that contradicts existing beliefs is rarely able to reach through people's preexisting filters. One way to surface an audience's potential filters is to analyze a story they believe, and particularly to surface

REFLECTIONS: OVERCOMING FILTERS

- Have you heard a piece of information (on the news, from a friend, etc.) that you did not believe? What made you not believe it?
- What are some other factors that make you believe or disbelieve information?
- Take a moment to write down some of the narrative filters that may prevent someone from believing the story around an issue you care about.

the assumptions underlying the story. The next section outlines one of the most simple but helpful narrative power analysis methods, which is to deconstruct a story we want to change using the Elements of Story.

~~2.12 The Elements of Story~~

Truth and power belong to those who tell the better story.
—Stephen Duncombe

In order to apply a narrative power analysis and create effective story-based strategies, it is helpful to understand the key narrative elements that allow stories to operate. Although there are many different aspects of what makes a story successful, CSS has found five elements that are particularly relevant for understanding how power operates in the story.

These five elements are: Conflict, Characters, Imagery, Foreshadowing, and Assumptions. Identifying these elements helps us deconstruct the stories we want to challenge and to construct the stories we want to tell. Chapter III outlines how successfully using these elements can help win the **battle of the story**. The Elements of Story provide a versatile framework to examine any level of narrative—from examining an opponent’s story, to mapping the media landscape around an issue, to analyzing deep-seated cultural narratives.

The institutional biases of the media often present politically marginalized people as at fault for their own problems, as helpless victims, or do not let them speak at all.

Chapter III outlines how successfully using these elements can help win the **battle of the story**. The Elements of Story provide a versatile framework to examine any level of narrative—from examining an opponent’s story, to mapping the media landscape around an issue, to analyzing deep-seated cultural narratives.

4.7 Reframing Debates

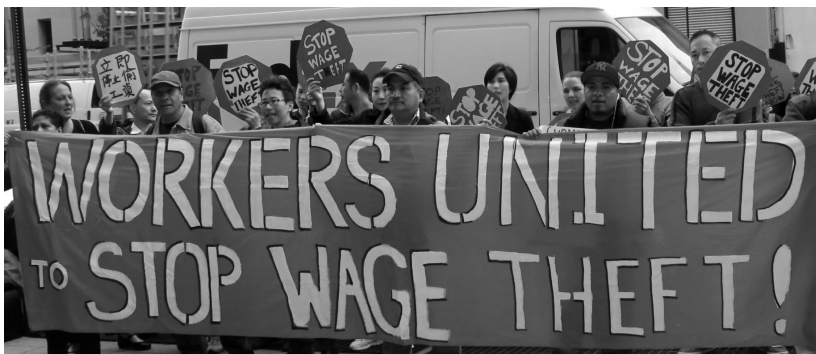
The fight is never about grapes or lettuce. It is always about people.
—César Chávez

Winning the battle of the story often requires reframing, which is the process of altering the meaning of the old story to tell a different story. Successful reframing shifts the perspective and changes the terms of the debate. This can happen by widening the frame, narrowing the frame, or moving the frame to another scene entirely. Redefining the debate is the best way to win an argument.

How do you do this? The first step is a thorough narrative power analysis to study how the issue is currently framed, and in particular, to identify the underlying assumptions that are shaping the dominant narrative. For example, you might surface unstated assumptions like: “corporate tax cuts will benefit everyone by growing the economy,” or “undocumented migrants should be treated as criminals with no rights,” or “U.S. foreign policy benevolently spreads democracy.”

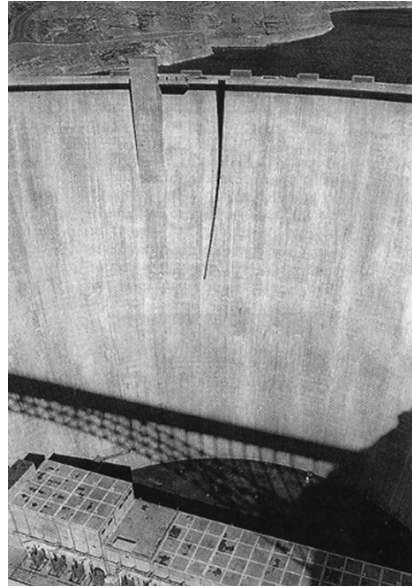
From this analysis, you can begin to develop another story that exposes the flawed assumptions of the status quo framing. There are many ways to do this and the elements of story offer different avenues for reframing. For instance, interventions that successfully reframe might amplify new characters who previously haven’t been heard, redefine the problem with a different set of values, or pose a new, more compelling solution.

A successful reframe can launch new memes and a whole new narrative around an issue. For instance, successful reframing by workers’



2015 New York protest by restaurant, nail salon, and other workers from New York’s Securing Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT) Coalition.⁷

In 1981, visionary environmental activists “cracked” Glen Canyon Dam to challenge the assumption that mega development projects were permanent. This intervention helped reframe the debate around dams and wilderness preservation.



rights advocates has created the “wage theft” meme. Too often workers get cheated by their bosses and get underpaid—or denied pay altogether—for work they have done, such as not getting paid for overtime or getting paid less than the legal minimum wage. This mistreatment of workers used to be referred to as “nonpayment of wages,” which was the official terminology used by the U.S. Department of Labor and echoed by the mainstream media. This framing assumes that the wages belong to the employers and it is their prerogative to decide when their workers actually deserve to be paid.

Workers’ rights organizations reframed the issue and began calling it “wage theft.” This makes it clear that the wages belong to the worker and have been stolen by the boss. This reframing makes the conflict much clearer and encourages us to sympathize with the wronged workers. Through organizing public campaigns, exploited workers and their allies have been successful at turning wage theft into a meme that has entered the broader economic discourse. The term is now routinely used in the media and has even been used in the name of legislation. As with any effective reframing, wage theft is shifting the public understanding of the issue and providing momentum to campaigns to win stronger worker protections.

Sometimes an issue can be reframed with a well-designed intervention in an unexpected and previously uncontested place. In 1981, environmentalists in the western United States were fighting to defend wilder-

ness areas from the assault of industrial extraction and megaprojects like giant dams. The newly formed radical ecology network Earth First! was thinking bigger than the usual protest at the point of destruction. They wanted to challenge the deep-seated narrative of technological progress “conquering” nature. So they decided to confront the assumption that industrial megaprojects like giant dams were permanent, immovable structures and foreshadow a future of undoing damage to the planet.

Their intervention was staged at Arizona’s Glen Canyon Dam, the second highest concrete arch dam in the United States. On the anniversary of the dam’s opening, the activists unfurled a huge black plastic banner down the face of the dam, visually creating a giant crack, and foreshadowing a day when dams would be removed and rivers restored.

Until their iconic action, the industrial paradigm of humanity dominating nature had rendered the question of removing a mega-dam off limits in the public debate. The “cracking” action challenged that assumption and expanded political space. Decades later, struggles against mega-dams continue around the world. But today, dam removal is increasingly embraced as a solution to restore damaged watersheds and the communities that call them home.



The yellow ribbon has symbolized hoping loved ones return safely from military service since the U.S. Civil War. During the 1979 Iran hostage crisis it became a ubiquitous symbol of public support for the safe return of the U.S. hostages. But over time pro-war forces associated the ribbon and the related “Support our Troops” slogan with overt support for war. The narrative was used to frame critics of both the 1991 and 2003 invasions of Iraq as not supporting the troops. Meme campaigner Andrew Boyd

helped launch an alternative narrative combining what had previously been opposing symbols—the antiwar peace symbol and the pro-war yellow ribbon. This new symbol re-frames the conflict to show that being antiwar is being pro-troops by adding “bring them home now.” It was widely used by the antiwar movement and eventually adopted as the logo of an organization of military families challenging U.S. war policies.

REFLECTIONS: REFRAMING

- Read or watch a piece of media relating to an issue you care about and apply a narrative power analysis. How are the elements of story being used to frame the issue? Pay particular attention to the assumptions underlying the current frame.
- Identify shifts you could make to different elements of the story that could reframe the issue.

4.8 Offering New Futures

For all of our ability to analyze and critique, the left has become rooted in what is. We often forget to envision what could be. . . . All organizing is science fiction.

—Walidah Imarisha

One place to find points of assumption is at the point in the story where the endings become contestable—where effective action can forecast a different future. Such vision-driven actions have always been a staple of successful social change. But by understanding them as interventions at a



Reclaiming public space to grow food, sometimes called guerrilla gardening, is an example of literally creating a different future. Even if the garden is only temporary it still prefigures a different possibility.

point of assumption we can focus on what has made them successful and work to replicate those aspects. Sometimes, this specific type of intervention is called the Point of Potential to highlight alternatives.

One of the most common assumptions in power-holders' narratives is some version of the "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) **control myth**.⁸ (See Section 3.9.) In these instances, the effective articulation of a plausible story about a different future can be a powerful challenge to the status quo narrative, particularly when the alternatives promoted are both "visionary and oppositional."⁹

Actions that contest a seemingly predetermined future are one type of action at the point of assumption. A few examples of this type of intervention include:

- Activists confront agricultural biotechnology and the corporate takeover of the food system by transforming an empty lot into a garden where neighbors can grow healthy, organic food.
- Homes Not Jails activists challenge city officials to provide more housing for low-income families by occupying an abandoned building to create a place for people to live.
- Public housing residents who have been pushing for a better childcare space take action at the local government office, and instead of just protesting, they transform the office into the day care center the community needs.¹⁰

There are many ways to offer new futures and to reflect choices between the different paths. One of CSS's collaborative, long-term strategy projects explored three competing visions of the future of the San Francisco Bay Area by producing different "newsfeeds" from the year 2030.¹¹ Each newsfeed portrayed a very different world based on the way social and political forces had responded to the ecological crisis. The newsfeed from the "Grey" scenario—where denial and fossil fuel addiction continue to shape policy—has stories about criminalizing "water poachers," salmon extinction, and increasing militarization. Meanwhile a "Pale Green" scenario revealed a world where efforts to address the ecological crisis fail to confront the social and economic roots of the problem. This newsfeed has stories about dangerous techno-fixes like geoengineering, "gene spill" quarantines, and economic apartheid alongside ads for personalized genetics and luxury eco-homes. Finally the "Gaia" scenario newsfeed shows (on the next page) a 2030 in which social movements lead a just transition away from fossil fuels and features stories about creating a new regional food system, defining the rights of eco-refugees, and struggles to implement an International People's Protocol on climate resilience.

The Bay Today
 San Francisco Bay Area
 September 19, 2030
 Updated 6am

SEARCH

WEATHER WATCH

MON 60°	TUES 60°	WED 65°	TH 60°	FRI 60°	SAT 60°	SUN 62°
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Richmond Gives Ultimatum to Chevron: Are You In or Out?
 "The best way to power up Richmond is to power down Chevron"
 —Mayor Doria Robinson

A New Food System Takes Root:
 How the Sacramento Regional Food Hub Transformed the Way the Bay Area Eats

Seizure of Public Lands for Resettlements Raises Ire of Feds
 Internally Displaced Peoples: The view from the tent cities

Balanced Water Budget Means Hard Choices
 Bio-Regional Water Conservation Districts reduce consensus on the fourth regional water plan

Golden Gate Spiders Block 12th Oil Tanker in Three Months

Launch of Traditional Environmental Knowledge Curriculum Across OUSD

Irata Googlebook CEO Threatens to Move Company Offshore if Corporate Server Tax is Implemented

National Evangelical Association Kicks Off "Forgiveness" Campaign: 50,000 Eco-Promise Keepers Called to Action

COOKING P.S.OOE: Green Gastronomy reports on the latest culinary trend: eating invasive species!

THIS WEEKEND: 13th Annual Bay Bridge Garden Work Party! It's our bridge. Let's keep it blooming!

In Our Sunday Magazine: THE "BOTTOM-UP ECONOMICS" ISSUE

Feature Article: How Richmond Survived the Crash: From Company Town to Grassroots Economy

Local Investment Initiatives At Work: Poplar Economics: Taking on the Corporation

Community Supported Agriculture: Still Growing After All These Years

The Rise of Health-Care Co-ops: Mondragon Meets Hippocrates

The Vallejo Land Trust Story: 30,000 Units off the Market, Developers in Uproar

Public Power Lights Up the Bay: Distributed Generation, The Rooftop Revolution and PG&E in the Backseat

From the Headwaters to the Hood: The New Youth Corps and Watershed Management

What future are we working toward? CSS created multiple newsfeeds from the year 2030 to spark long-term movement strategy conversations. Design by Micah Bazant

The fundamental question for these types of interventions, in whatever form they occur, is: "What if . . . ?" Even if the action is a symbolic foreshadowing rather than a concrete plan, it can still challenge the status quo narrative by offering glimpses of alternatives. This type of intervention can reframe a problem and open up collective imagination to new ideas, new possibilities, new solutions, and new ways of being.

~~4.9. Subverting and Creating Spectacles~~

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real.

—Jean Baudrillard

We live in an age of media saturation where political battles are often waged with clickbait headlines across social media and 24-hour news cycles. In this context, shaping media coverage has become even more important and decision-makers and power-holders often supplement their usual diet of sound bite politics with sophisticated media events. These events range from routine press conferences and rituals like ribbon cuttings to action-

6.6 A Movement of Storytellers

We are an army of dreamers, and that's why we're invincible.
—Subcomandante Marcos, Ejército Zapatista de Liberación
Nacional

As strategists and communicators working in grassroots movements, our task is not just to calculate the best response to public opinion. Our task is to *shape* public opinion to build and support real solutions and structural change.

Winning the battle of the story—and creating more fertile cultural ground for movement building and organizing—will require expanding our skills, our strategies, and our connectivity infrastructure. Every activist's toolbox and every social change organization's approach should include story-based strategy basics: how to analyze dominant culture narratives, reframe issues, and craft effective messages. That's why we wrote this book and why we cofounded the Center for Story-based Strategy.

We have learned that the best way to build this story-based strategy capacity is to grow it from the ground up as part of grassroots social movements. To develop these types of transformative narratives requires story-based strategists who are actively embedded in the frontlines of grassroots struggles. We need a movement of storytellers.

There are no certain paths to the world we deserve, no one blueprint to win the future. This is why our movements must nurture a culture of strategic innovation. Imagine community-led organizations with research and development budgets, street level laboratories, and swarms of creative strategists. In an era of accelerating change, activist culture must evolve to see innovation not as a luxury at the edge of *the work*, but rather



Re:Imagining Change is a call to innovation. What are you doing to change the story for a better future?

as a necessity that drives *the work*. We must be willing to take risks, fail, and innovate faster. We must reimagine not only a vision for our world, but also a vision of what social change process and practice can look like.

And make no mistake, bold innovations are emerging, especially in response to the rise of the Trump regime. Innovative organizations are stepping beyond single-issue politics to open new political spaces for movement building, test new models, and embrace new organizational forms. Leaders are forging alliances that build unity amongst different constituencies without denying differences or compromising diversity. Story-based approaches are helping bridge historic divides and articulate shared values that effectively communicate the connections between all the issues. But will it be enough to narrate the broader, inviting story of transformation we need to scale our movements?

Over 35 years ago, social ecologist Murray Bookchin theorized that as capitalism hit the planet's ecological limits, struggling elites would turn toward fascism to maintain social control amidst catastrophic social upheaval and ecological collapse. His stark warning resonates even more deeply today: "If we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable."¹⁹

Our generations have the opportunity to lead a path toward ecological reconstruction, reconciliation with history's crimes, a more free, just society, and ultimately, a better world for all. We can transform fear and denial into hope and action, but only if we step into our collective power as story makers and story changers.

The transformational stories of 21st-century change will not be handed down from the meme-makers on high but rather bubble up as collaborative strategies from communities and grassroots movements on the forefront of transition. The new stories will emerge from struggle and celebration, amplify the (s)heroes at the margins, and inspire us to meet the true scale of our problems. Most importantly, they will reveal the creative sparks to do the seemingly impossible: reimagine change and remake our world. ■



As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic."¹⁸