THE FUTURE OF
BLACK INSTITUTIONS

POWERED BY FRONTLINE

The Future of Black Institutions:

ALIGNING NARRATIVE, TECH, & CAPITAL FOR COLLECTIVE POWER









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INTRODUCTION

On May 4-6, 2026, Frontline and sixteen partner organizations launched The Future of Black Institutions Initiative (FBIS) with a historic symposium in New Orleans. This gathering of 150 cross-sector leaders ***aimed to imagine and ignite the future of Black institutions—so that the communities they impact have the resilient, innovative, and trusted infrastructure needed to thrive for generations.***

Black institutions face a pivotal moment. ***As resources tighten and political attacks intensify, the operating environment has become increasingly complex. The connective tissue that once linked leaders and coordinated action across institutions has eroded just when it is needed most.*** The stakes of this reality were starkly apparent as the symposium took place in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision to effectively gut the Voting Rights Act.

> *We've just had a moment out of the Supreme Court that will test our ability to stand up.*
>
> ***Derrick Johnson, NAACP, Opening Plenary***



FBIS: Aligning Narrative, Tech, & Capital for Collective Power

INTRODUCTION

Yet, the symposium made clear that today's Black institutions are structural anchors of a functioning multi-racial democracy. They hold the civic capacity that keeps systems accountable to the people they most often fail: voter protection, trusted information, legal defense, mutual aid, and the organizing muscle that turns communities into constituencies. The symposium's agenda focused on strengthening this vital capacity and building a coordinated offense with a future-forward vision.

This report compiles critical questions, emerging ideas, and key insights from the symposium, focusing on four strategic pillars:

1. STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER
2. RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER
3. ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL
4. BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER



INTRODUCTION

It also provides resources to help leaders take action to align and strengthen Black institutions in your communities. From examining the relationship between the media and Black civic life to confronting the risks and possibilities of an AI-driven future, from crafting a strategic response to attacks on Black political power to articulating a vision for an economic system grounded in repair rather than extraction, the Future of Black Institutions Initiative reflects a game-changing commitment to positioning Black institutions as architects of the future.

We hope this resource helps you diagnose the challenges to this vision, interrogate the systems that produce them, and imagine what must be built in their place. As Liz Thompson, Founder and CEO of the Cafe Group, reminded us at the symposium, we must approach this work with "lucid optimism," neither denying the many challenges nor failing to dream boldly. Our builder's moment is now.



STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

Narrative is a critical element of political, cultural, and economic power. The concentration of ownership and distribution power among a small number of media actors limits whose stories are told and how they are framed, while longstanding patterns of distortion continue to depict Black communities through a narrow lens of crisis, poverty, and criminality. Given the rise of digital platforms as primary sources of information, these dynamics are compounded by the spread of misinformation and disinformation that disproportionately targets Black audiences and undermines civic participation.

Meanwhile, Black media has long served as a vital ecosystem through which Black communities have defined themselves and built a collective identity across place and time.



That role continues in contemporary Black media, which provides spaces where Black communities can interpret the world on their own terms and preserve their histories and cultural memory. The role of independent Black media, as well as philanthropy supporting local news and initiatives to diversify institutional newsrooms, is growing. Further, the spread of social media presents an unprecedented opportunity for on-the-ground news directly from the most affected communities. Given the Black community's leadership in the digital landscape, investing in culture-making and culture-keeping through digital platforms is an important strategy to counter the negative impacts of consolidation and the defunding of local news.

At the symposium, we brought together some of the

STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

leading narrative strategists, and Black media professionals, including Georgia Fort, Detavio Samuels, Sherrie Deans, and Nadine Smith, for a conversation about community-owned storytelling, narrative re-alignment for movement-building in the age of disinformation, and the importance of media for the futures we're trying to build. Key takeaways included:

THE POWER AND PITFALLS OF MEDIA

- **Narrative is foundational to Black power.** From the earliest Black newspapers to today's digital outlets, Black media has helped communities interpret political conditions, preserve memory, and imagine collective futures, making the future of Black institutions inseparable from Black communities' ability to produce and distribute their own stories at scale.
- **Protect Black journalism.** The famous photograph of Emmett Till, taken by Jet magazine photographer David Jackson, was published in *Jet* in September 1955, exposing the horrors of white supremacy and galvanizing the Civil Rights Movement. Today, independent Black journalists are reporting from the front lines of the most critical issues facing our communities, from resistance movements against ICE in Minnesota to attacks on Black voting rights across the South and beyond. They are vital because they earn community trust, show up when others fear political reprisal, and influence national media by covering angles the mainstream often misses. Meanwhile, journalism is increasingly being criminalized, an attack on our community's right to know the truth and a



STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

reflection of an unprecedented global decline in media freedom.

- **Urgency of investment.** It is crucial for Black institutions to build partnerships with and invest in the essential infrastructure of the Black media to ensure authentic, honest, and rigorous storytelling about our communities and counter the harm caused by the long, ongoing legacy of stereotypical and harmful Black representation in media.

THE NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE

- **Weaponization of the media.** The media is a primary arena where the terms of Black life are negotiated, and it is being weaponized against Black communities. The opposition to Black liberation vastly outspends Black media on right-wing platforms.
- **A creator economy.** Traditional media institutions now compete with individual people and content creators in an unprecedented power shift, making the creator economy a transformative new field.
- **Algorithmic bias.** The digital square is privately owned, and algorithms actively obstruct Black stories and messages, often rewarding sensational and destructive content over truth. AI accelerates the spread of misinformation.
- **Cultural exploitation.** Black people drive culture but are often denied the economic value of the creator economy, underscoring the need for strategies and innovation to monetize influence.

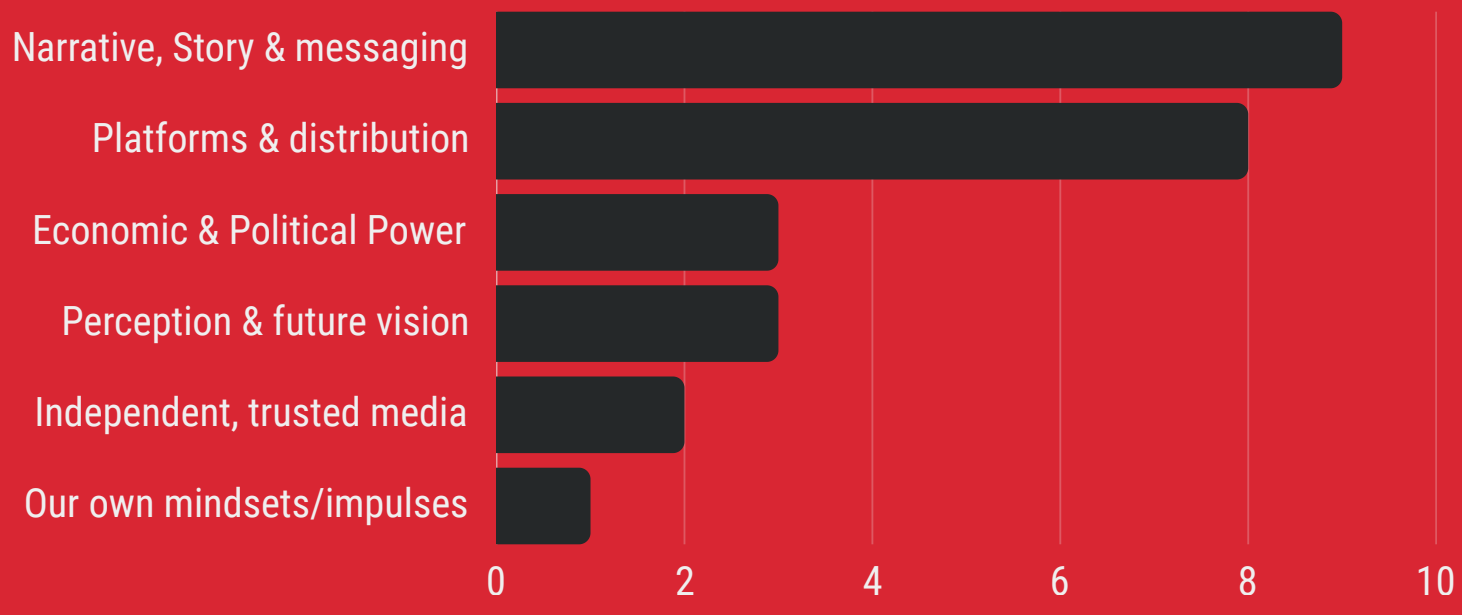
STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

- **Coordination and alignment.** We must improve our ability to align and coordinate Black media and narrative efforts to leverage Black cultural influence and power.
- **Culture as a tool.** For Black power-building agendas to succeed, they must be embedded in culture (art, media, sports, and entertainment), which can serve as entry points for political education. Black media must market to the “whole being,” meeting people where they are.
- **Future-casting and instigating.** Institutions must become ‘instigators,’ not just narrators, harnessing the power of declaring the desired future into existence.

STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

- **Solidarity and collective ownership.** The story of Black people is global. We must seek to bring Black communities together, build solidarity, share ancestral wisdom, and grow power to fight global anti-Blackness.

During the event, we used the Whova app to poll attendees with open-ended questions. Below are the responses to: "*Black narrative power becomes real when we control ____.*" Answers have been grouped into common themes for clarity, since many attendees expressed similar ideas in their own words.



> *Our work was historically rooted in community--it came from church, the cookout, speakeasies--it wasn't separate from culture. There came a moment where we removed political functions out of culture, and now we're trying to figure out how to be relevant to the culture, instead of embedded in it.*
>
> ***Nadine Smith, Color of Change, The Future of Media and Why Narrative Power is Vital for Black Institutions***

STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Invest in independent Black media:** Direct long-term capital and philanthropic funding toward independent Black journalists and community-owned outlets to protect field reporting and safeguard against political and market pressures.
- **Engage the creator economy:** Support strategic partnerships among Black philanthropy, media, digital creators, and cultural influencers to embed key civic narratives into art, entertainment, and digital media platforms.
- **Counter algorithmic bias & disinformation:** Form a cross-sector collaborative to build narrative infrastructure and develop strategies to proactively counter algorithmic suppression, misinformation, and opposition from right-wing media.
- **Preserve Black cultural influence:** Establish legal mechanisms and funding models to ensure Black content creators retain ownership and are fairly compensated for their cultural contributions.

SELECT RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND STRENGTHENING BLACK NARRATIVE POWER

- Repair. Reimagine. Rebuild: Modeling the Future of News For and By Black, Brown, and Indigenous Communities (Borealis Philanthropy)The New (Black) Civics: How Popular Media Cultivates Connected Learning and Civic Engagement Among Black College Students (First Monday)
- We All We Got: A Digital Green Book for the Culture (Onyx Impact)



RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER



Ever-advancing technological systems have become the infrastructure through which society is organized, shaping how people access capital, engage with democratic and cultural infrastructure, and interact with institutions that govern daily life. These technologies are not neutral and carry significant ramifications for Black communities. As artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and data-driven systems are embedded across sectors, including finance, housing, healthcare, media, and public safety, the potential for these systems to perpetuate historical and systemic harms is high.

Technology like AI reflects the values, assumptions, and historical data on which they are built, often reproducing existing inequities at greater speed and scale. Today, there is growing recognition that technological systems are sites of both risk and opportunity for Black institutions. At the same time, Black communities are increasingly at the forefront of digital culture, technological adoption, and emerging innovation ecosystems, creating new pathways to influence how these systems are designed, governed, and deployed, ensuring

RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

they reflect community needs and values.

At the symposium, some of the foremost scholars and leaders in equity-centered technology explored how we can best harness the current moment:

THE DUAL REALITY OF NAVIGATING HARM AND SHAPING INNOVATION

- **Key Challenges**. Dr. Allison Scott, CEO of the Kapor Foundation, framed the issues, noting that technological advancement is accelerating faster than the systems designed to govern it, embedding bias and inequity into the infrastructure of everyday life. From AI-driven lending and hiring decisions to surveillance technologies, digital platforms that shape information access, and data centers that warm the environment and use water communities need, these systems often reflect historical patterns of exclusion and oppression while operating with limited transparency and accountability. As a result, innovation is not only reproducing disparities in areas like capital access, public safety, and environmental health but also expanding their reach through systems that are increasingly difficult to interrogate or challenge. Reclaiming technological power for Black communities requires simultaneously mitigating harm within systems that encode bias and building the capacity to participate in and shape the technological landscape.



- **Resisting the narrative of technological inevitability.** Black institutions must collectively interrogate and actively resist big tech's narrative of "technological inevitability" or "techno-determinism," which frames their priorities and

products as an inevitable force of nature that people and communities have no choice but to adopt and adapt to.

- **Shaping innovation.** By engaging in the collective development and governance of technological infrastructure, Black institutions can move beyond navigating risk to actively shaping innovation as a tool for equity, access, and long-term power. The scale and speed of change demand a coordinated, multi-sector agenda that prioritizes community needs over big-tech interests.

BUILDING NEW TECHNOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

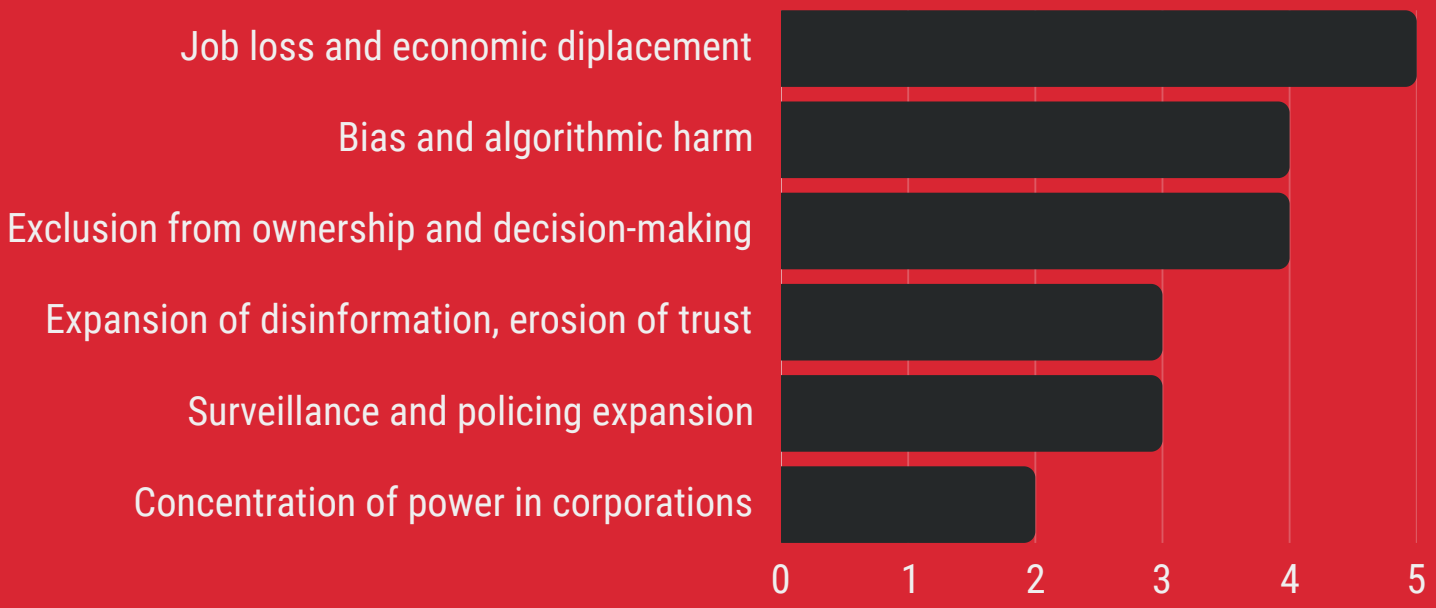
Our conversations at the symposium surfaced lessons, including:

- **Technological innovation is NOT synonymous with social progress,** as many current systems are tied to exploitation and surveillance.
- **Expansive vision.** Many of the people building the technologies that are reshaping society and our future are committed to maintaining existing unjust power hierarchies and systems of oppression. Their vision will not save us, and countering it requires us to harness radical imagination and ancestral wisdom to envision systems that serve our communities.
- **Asking better questions.** Technological harms are often created and advanced by asking the wrong questions. Rather than rooting our questions and vision in existing colonialist and oppressive paradigms, we must challenge the fundamental problems we aim to solve, asking who created them, who benefits from maintaining them, and how to interrupt the dynamics that produce them.
- **Relying on community.** We must reject the premise, embraced by and embedded in today's technological paradigms, that elevates individual convenience over collective well-being and selfishness over solidarity. What would it look like to see beyond 'what is' toward 'what could be' if we worked together in new ways? What would it look like if we learned from our rich historical legacies of communities showing up for one another? What would it look like to be led by the visions of those for whom imagining a new world

RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

beyond borders, surveillance, and supremacy is existential?

Attendees used the Whova app to select from preset concerns in response to: *"What concerns you most about an AI-shaped future for Black communities?"* (21 total responses.)



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Build community governance:** Create cross-sector coalitions to interrogate big tech narratives, policies, and tools, and establish mechanisms for governing technological infrastructure that are rooted in community priorities.
- **Counter algorithmic and technological harm:** Build the policy infrastructure and oversight frameworks to audit and challenge algorithmic bias and harm caused by AI-driven lending, hiring, public safety, surveillance, and platforms.
- **Invest in Black technologists:** Align philanthropy, policy, and capital to resource and convene Black researchers, founders, and technologists so they can design and lead equitable and just innovation ecosystems.

RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

- **Redefine innovation:** Mobilize a collective narrative and policy change effort to redefine technological progress around ancestral intelligence, abundant imagination, collective well-being, and human accountability rather than profit.

SELECT RESOURCES FOR RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

- How the U.S. Public and AI Experts View Artificial Intelligence (Pew Research Center)
- The Black Tech Ecosystem (The Kapor Center)
- For Us By Us": Intentionally Designing Technology for Lived Black Experiences (ACM Digital Library)
- The Hope Gap XR: An immersive atlas of justice, memory and possibility



ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

Capital markets, despite being designed to exclude and extract from Black people, are integral to the success of Black institutions. Building assets, accessing bond markets, structuring blended capital stacks, attracting private equity dollars, and more are key to Black institutions realizing their potential and achieving impact.

Today, Black participation in capital markets is growing alongside rising entrepreneurship and increased entry into investment spaces, yet structural barriers in financing, valuation, and decision-making continue to limit the ability to scale. Further, the concentration of capital within a narrow set of institutions and actors reinforces patterns in which Black founders, investors, and communities are consistently under-resourced despite demonstrated demand and activity. Given the persistence of these dynamics, disparities in wealthbuilding are less a function of participation and more a function of how capital is distributed and controlled.



There is a growing opportunity to reorient capital markets toward models that expand ownership, influence, and long-term wealth creation in Black communities. The emergence of community finance institutions, Black-led venture networks, and equity-focused public investment strategies offers new pathways to deploy capital more equitably and at scale. Given the volume of capital already moving through systems such as municipal finance, impact investing, and community lending, aligning these flows with equitable frameworks positions Black institutions to shape the direction and outcomes of capital investment.

ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

At the symposium, we heard from leading practitioners from across the capital ecosystem, spanning impact investing, venture capital, and economic development. It was clear that advancing reparative capital is the name of the game when it comes to the role of capital providers in the future of Black institutions–community ownership, community-building, and the deliberate shedding of systems, metrics, and structures designed to create closed-loop access to resources.

A VISION FOR REPARATIVE CAPITAL

In a dynamic and far-reaching conversation, Trevor Smith, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the BLIS Collective, Jessica Norwood, Founder and CEO of RUNWAY Roots, and Damon King, Senior Counsel in the Economic Justice Program at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, presented a bold vision for reparative capital that addresses historical economic injustices and builds generational wealth for Black and other historically marginalized communities. They also provided a roadmap for leaders and institutions to create lasting systemic change:

- **Addressing the "hope gap."** Reparations should be understood as a cultural project as much as an economic one. While Black people overwhelmingly support reparations, belief in their feasibility is low. Closing the gap requires storytelling that inspires people to imagine what's possible.
- **Building a shared historical analysis.** Policy progress toward reparations is hindered by gaps in historical knowledge. Indeed, we are in a period of mass historical repression aimed at obscuring how the legacies of slavery and segregation have led to present systemic inequities. Addressing these gaps through historical and political education is vital to building the broad public consensus needed to advance a robust reparations agenda.
- **Redefining the investment terms.** Reparative capital requires an approach that prioritizes dignity, respect, and social impact over traditional market-rate returns and that creates systems that don't rely solely on traditional, exclusionary capital structures.

ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

- **Connecting political and economic organizing.** Preventing ongoing extraction and hoarding of wealth requires greater collaboration and alignment between institutions and movements working to build political and economic power. The ultimate goal must go beyond simply closing statistical wealth gaps to challenge the systemic anti-Blackness that creates them.
- **Building resilience and solidarity.** It is essential to build solidarity and power across global Black communities. This includes learning from one another, deepening strategies to build collective power, and acknowledging our shared grief in order to identify what is truly valuable and worth preserving as we build alternative systems.

Attendees used the Whova app to select from preset options in response to: "*Which reparative capital strategy should our sector prioritize first?*" (26 responses recorded)



ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

THE FUTURE OF BLACK PROSPERITY

A panel featuring Andrea O'Neal, Senior Advisor at the Black Economic Alliance, Amber Banks, President and CEO of the African American Alliance of CDFI CEOs, and Edgar Romney, Executive Vice President and Chief Strategy and Administrative Officer at Amalgamated Bank, outlined strategies for building an ecosystem that fosters Black economic prosperity and political power. The conversation highlighted the critical role of cross-sector collaboration, the need to re-evaluate traditional financial systems, and the imperative to build institutional resilience:

- **Challenging old metrics.** Expanding Black prosperity requires challenging traditional metrics of creditworthiness and access. We must move toward structures that prioritize long-term community wealth and allow Black business owners to scale effectively, rather than relying on systems that were not built to serve them.
- **Leveraging strategic partnerships.** Achieving economic self-determination requires a multi-sector approach that connects philanthropy, private capital, and public policy. By mobilizing corporate and business leaders, organizations can build stronger local business ecosystems and secure essential community assets, such as heirs' property.
- **Rethinking innovation.** A central theme was the importance of constructing strong, sustainable foundations that can weather political and economic volatility. Instead of constant, pressure-driven innovation, there is a greater need to support and scale programs that are already proven to work, such as Black-led Community Development Financial Institutions that foster community resilience and wealth-building.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen historical literacy:** Convene a multi-sector coalition to advance historical and political education, craft narrative and storytelling campaigns, build public consensus, and demonstrate the feasibility of a robust reparations agenda.
- **Update the capital playbook:** Launch a collective campaign and blueprint to shift the financial sector away from traditional, exclusionary creditworthiness metrics and

ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

market-rate return requirements toward models prioritizing dignity, social impact, and long-term community wealth creation.

- **Cultivate multi-sector strategic partnerships:** Align philanthropy, private capital, and public policy to support and scale proven solutions, such as Black-led CDFIs, and transition from isolated pilot programs toward systemic change.
- **Connect political and economic power:** Foster deeper alignment between Black political organizing and equitable capital innovators to combat wealth extraction and dismantle systemic anti-Blackness.

SELECT RESOURCES FOR ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

- Understanding Black Americans' Views on Work, Wages & Wealth (Black Economic Alliance)
- Know Your Price: The Devaluation of Assets in Black Communities (Andre Perry)
- The Case for Reparations for Black Americans (Brookings)
- RUNWAY Roots Labs (RUNWAY Roots)
- BLIS Collective Narrative Research (BLIS Collective)



BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER



On April 29, 2026, just days before we gathered in New Orleans, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 6-3 ruling in Louisiana v. Callais, struck down a Louisiana congressional map that created a second majority-Black district. The decision effectively dismantled the last major provision of the Voting Rights Act and eliminated the law's protections against racial gerrymandering. It was a stark reminder that, in the current climate, building Black political power requires recognizing that the erosion of rights and the intentional dismantling of democratic foundations and norms constitute an existential threat that demands courageous and sustained collective action. At the symposium, national and local movement leaders led several provocative discussions that illuminated a path forward:

POWER IS THE CENTER

Derrick Johnson, CEO of the NAACP; Ashley Shelton, Executive Director of the Power Coalition; Patrice Sulton, Executive Director of the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law;

BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

Quentin James, Founder and President of the Collective PAC; and Nse Ufot, Founder of Solidarity Analytics and Media, reminded us that Black political power has always been an anchor of Black wellbeing and highlighted the importance of:

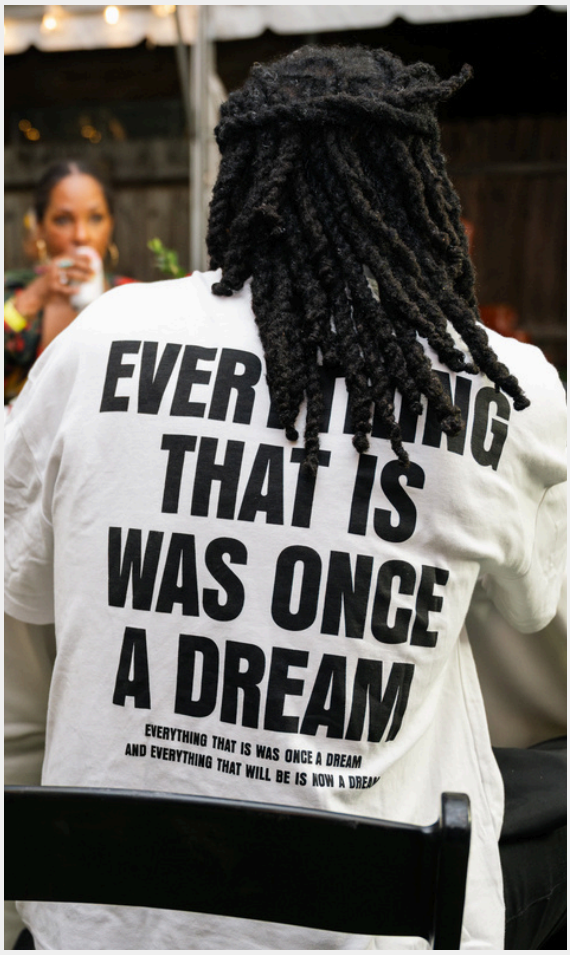
- **Investing in local organizing.** National norms are insufficient for the current crisis. Organizing must focus on state-based strategies to secure voting rights and reclaim influence.
- **Prioritizing Southern organizing as a national imperative.** Because many harmful national policies are seeded and tested in the South, focusing on Southern organizing is essential to shifting the nation's trajectory.
- **Challenging external power structures.** We must disrupt the overreliance on outside consultants and institutional philanthropy, which often overlook proven local expertise. Trusting the strategies and wisdom of organizers who have demonstrated success within their own communities is more effective than deferring to outside perspectives that may not understand local realities.
- **Shifting from reactive to proactive visioning.** We must move beyond "managing decline" and defending the status quo. As Nse Ufot put it, "We should consider ourselves the new founders of the new America" by crafting a proactive, long-term agenda rooted in systemic repair and historical accountability.
- **Rejecting scarcity and individualism.** We cannot afford to wait for a single savior, and the scarcity model is unsustainable. We must replace ego-centric leadership with trust-based relationships among institutions, where everyone contributes their unique expertise to a collective strategy.
- **Building institutional support for governance.** Winning elections is only the first step. We must support elected leaders once they are in office by creating institutional containers for Black policy and governance that provide policy platforms and protection for candidates and elected officials, so they do not have to operate in isolation, and momentum is sustained beyond the election cycle.

BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

BACK TO THE FUTURE

We also heard from Ethel Issacs Williams, President of The Links Incorporated; Reverend Thomas Bowen, General Secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.; Dr. Stacie N.C. Grant, International President of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc.; Ronald Carrere Jr., Chief of Staff and Vice President of Government & Community Relations at Xavier University; and Rev. CeCe Jones-Davis, Chief Operating Officer at Faith Out Loud, who emphasized how some of "the original" Black institutions, including churches, HBCUs, the Divine Nine, and volunteer service organizations, are adapting and organizing their members and communities to build on their legacies:

- **Evolving institutional methods.** While Black legacy institutions serve as foundational pillars of the community, they must balance preserving their core missions with evolving their operational methods to remain relevant, authentic, and accessible to younger generations.
- **Prioritizing intergenerational leadership.** Succession planning must move beyond family-based or seniority-based gatekeeping. Leaders should actively mentor and empower young people rather than expecting them to "wait their turn," ensuring that future leadership reflects present realities and multigenerational perspectives.
- **Strengthening coalitions.** Too many of our institutions currently operate in silos and must prioritize cross-institutional connectivity. Creating a unified, inclusive front—including building and strengthening bridges with the LGBTQ+ community—is essential to effectively addressing ongoing economic and civil rights challenges.



BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

- **Resilience and Innovation.** Institutions serving Black communities are always affected by economic downturns. Surviving requires both resilience and innovation–doing more with less.

Attendees offered suggestions for how the church can be more responsive to the evolving culture, including offering political education to build common connection across generations.

EMERGING ATTENDEE INSIGHTS FROM THE WHOVA APP

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

In a wide-ranging discussion, leaders including Phil Agnew, Co-Founder, Roots Bookstore & Market; Temi Bennett, Co-CEO at the iF Foundation; David Johns, Executive Director, National Black Justice Coalition; Taifa Butler, President, Demos; and Sharon Bush, President, Grand Victoria Foundation, explored strategies for building Black power in the face of systemic racism and authoritarianism:

- **Prioritize material needs to build trust.** Organizations can effectively counter the dismantling of the social safety net by directly providing for the community's immediate



BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

- **Build trust before action.** Sustainable progress requires creating containers of safety and trust where relationships are established before rushing into strategy or critique.
- **Foster growth and grace.** Rather than demanding immediate perfection, we must create space for people and institutions to evolve, acknowledging that growth takes time and shared support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Invest in local and Southern organizing:** Align philanthropic resources toward local and grassroots organizing efforts, especially in the South, to defend and promote social justice, protect constitutional rights and fairness, and build sustainable political power.
- **Create enduring infrastructure for Black governance:** Establish permanent structures and policy frameworks to protect and support elected Black eaders beyond election cycles.
- **Expand and elevate leadership:** Prioritize cross-institutional coalitions to build learning and practice across succession planning, mentorship, and talent pipelines, bridging internal divides and including diverse voices.
- **Address immediate material needs:** Marry long-term political strategy with robust and sustained direct community support—such as food, healthcare, and education—to build trust and resilience.



BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

SELECT RESOURCES FOR BUILDING POLITICAL POWER

- Our 2025 (NAACP)
- Reconstructing Black Political Power (Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review)
- Building Black Resources and Political Power (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- Black Power Exhibition Resource Guide (New York Public Library)
- Building Black Political Power at the Intersection of Movement and Electoral Justice (Sojourn Strategies)



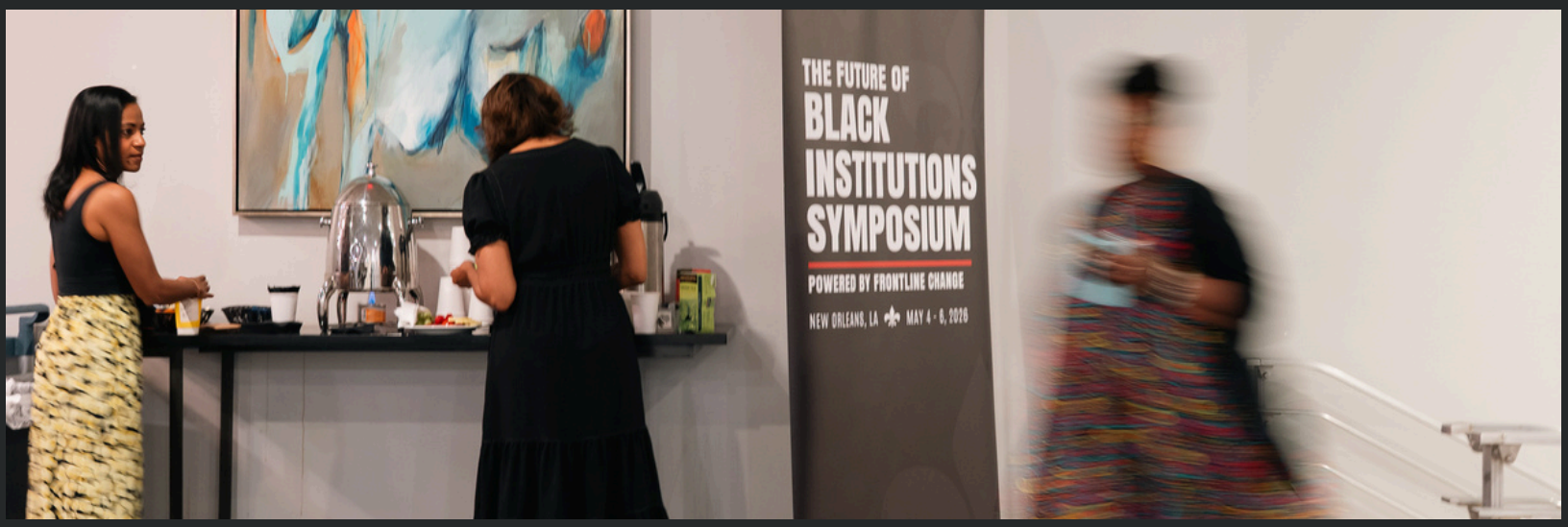
WHERE THIS ANALYSIS POINTS:

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY ACROSS INSTITUTIONS AND PILLARS

The symposium revealed a shared diagnosis across all four pillars–narrative, technology, reparative capital, and political power: ***While Black institutions are pivoting from defense to proactive future-building, there is vital work to be done to strengthen the connective capacity that enables them to defend democracy, withstand attacks, and redefine their roles.***

The recommendations that surfaced in our conversations all point in the same direction, underscoring that ***to create a lasting impact, Black institutions must move beyond defending their own missions and organizational survival to intentionally cultivate deeper cross-sector alignment, community-rooted governance, shared vision and analysis, and sustained collective investment.***

To that end, ***The Future of Black Institutions Initiative envisions a vibrant ecosystem of Black institutions working together to create intentional, strategic spaces for honest dialogue and debate.*** A powerful outcome of the symposium was a closed-door meeting of Southern frontline organizers who, facing the erosion of the Voting Rights Act, regrouped and emerged with concrete actions and next steps. ***We are committed to supercharging the infrastructure that made this possible—anchored in shared data, unified strategy, coordinated resources, and the intentional convening of leaders at critical moments.***



CONCLUSION

By aligning narrative, technology, capital, and political power, Black institutions can transform the challenges of this political moment into unprecedented systemic transformation and impact. We invite leaders across every sector to leverage the insights, recommendations, and resources in this report to actively shape, resource, and defend the shared infrastructure our communities deserve. We invite leaders across every sector to leverage the insights, recommendations, and resources in this report to actively shape, fund, and defend the shared infrastructure our communities deserve. The time to build is now.

> *I want what we develop, whatever this is, to be the counterpoint to this false sense of scarcity of Black brilliance. We all know brilliant people within our communities. That is what we set out to do. There needed to be a container that holds a mission to counter that false assertion.*
>
> ***Marcus Littles, Frontline, Closing Remarks***



Keep the Discussion Going: Activities & Agendas

The following agendas have been designed to help you dig Into the emerging themes from the Symposium with your organization or team. Feel free to adapt the questions and activites.



STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

ACTIVITY AGENDA: MAP YOURSELF IN THE LANDSCAPE

Where do you lie within the narrative landscape?

FORMAT	SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY
TIME	25-30 MINS
Step One	**Draw or project a concentric circle diagram:** • **Center circle:** "Narratives that get amplified — sustained coverage, cultural saturation, institutional legitimacy" • **Middle ring:** "Narratives that get partial/temporary coverage — a news cycle, then fade" • **Outer ring:** "Narratives that get ignored or actively suppressed"
Step Two 7 mins Individual Placement	**Give each participant 3 sticky notes in different colors:** • Color 1: Where does your community's story currently sit? (Be specific: name an actual story, issue, or narrative, not an abstraction.)

STRENGTHENING NARRATIVE POWER

Step Two 7 mins Individual Placement	• Color 2: Where does your organization's narrative work currently sit? • Color 3: Where do you want it to sit in 2 years? **Place your notes silently first.**
Step Three 8 mins Small Group Discussion	**Walk through the map together:** • What patterns do you notice in where things landed? • Pick one note from the group that surprised someone else. Why did it land where it did?
Step Four 10 mins Full Group Discussion	• What moved a story from the outer ring to the center, historically? Name real examples. • Is 'getting to the center' always the goal? When is staying at the edges strategically better? • What's one thing in this room's control that could move a note one ring inward in the next year?

RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

ACTIVITY AGENDA: LINEAGE OF INNOVATORS	
What technological and systems genius did our people already carry?	
FORMAT	SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY
TIME	35-45 MINS
PREWORK	Prepare 2–3 facilitator examples of your own ancestors/lineage figures and what they practiced, to model vulnerability and depth before asking participants to share.
FRAMING	We're taught that innovation looks like Silicon Valley: a garage, a startup, a patent. Today, we're naming a different kind of innovation: the systems our ancestors and elders built to navigate, communicate, heal, feed, and protect people, often under conditions designed to destroy them.

RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

Step One
15 mins
 	
Individual Placement
	List 3–5 ancestors or lineage figures (blood family, cultural lineage, or chosen elders)
	• Next to each, name what system or technical knowledge they carried — not just a virtue, but a practice with mechanics.
	• *Examples:*
	  ◦ Navigation/wayfinding — celestial navigation, reading currents, oral maps
	  ◦ Communication systems — oral tradition as high-fidelity data transmission, coded songs, quilting codes, drum communication
	  ◦ Agricultural/land engineering — terracing, companion planting, seed saving, controlled burns
	  ◦ Financial technology — susu/sou-sou, hawala-style trust networks, rotating credit associations
	  ◦ Medical/healing systems — herbal pharmacology, midwifery, communal mental health practices
	  ◦ Architecture/climate tech — passive cooling design, materials suited to local climate
	  ◦ Security/encrypted networks — the Underground Railroad as a distributed, need-to-know, encrypted communication and logistics system

RECLAIMING TECHNOLOGICAL POWER

Step Two 10-12 mins Pair/Trio Share	**Each person shares one ancestor and system. Others listen and discuss a clarifying question:** • What made that system work? What would break it?
Step Three 10 mins Full Group Discussion	**Prompts:** • What practice made survival possible? • What wisdom did my people carry that outperformed its replacement? • Where did colonization or capitalism call this "primitive" instead of "sophisticated"? • What would it look like to run that system on today's tools? • What seed of that system am I already watering, knowingly or not?

ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

ACTIVITY AGENDA: FUNDER SELF-AUDIT

What does it look like to map real funding relationships on a trust vs. control grid?	
FORMAT	SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY
TIME	40-50 MINS
FRAMING	This isn't an exercise for grantees to grade funders. It's for funders to look honestly at their own practices; where do you actually operate, versus where you say you operate?
RESOURCES	Use this worksheet to help guide your audit.
Step One 15 mins Group Activity	**Each funder (or funder team) plots their own real grantmaking practices — not their mission statement language, their actual mechanics:**

ADVANCING REPARATIVE CAPITAL

Step One 7 mins Individual Placement	• **Reporting requirements:** how frequent, how burdensome, proportional to grant size? • **Renewal process:** does trust build over time, or does every cycle reset to zero scrutiny? • **Decision-making:** who's in the room when funding decisions get made — any Black leadership, any grantee voice? • **Timeline:** multi-year commitment, or year-to-year uncertainty that grantees have to plan around?
Step Two 8 mins Small Group Discussion	**Walk through the map together:** • What patterns do you notice in where things landed? • Pick one note from the group that surprised someone else. Why did it land where it did?
Step Three 10 mins Full Group Discussion	• What moved a story from the outer ring to the center, historically? Name real examples. • Is 'getting to the center' always the goal? When is staying at the edges strategically better? • What's one thing in this room's control that could move a note one ring inward in the next year?

BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

ACTIVITY AGENDA: POWER MAPPING EXERCISE	
Who actually holds decision-making power over an issue, and where are the pressure points?	
FORMAT	SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY
TIME	40-50 MINS
FRAMING	We're going to map power based on who literally has the ability to make this decision, and who that person actually listens to.
RESOURCES	Use this power map from the commons library to guide you.
Step One 15-20 mins Group Activity	Name the decision-maker–Get specific: not "the city council" but the specific council member whose vote is actually in play, or the specific department head who has to sign off. If there are multiple, list them and prioritize the one most winnable or most pivotal: • **Influencers (fear/listen to):** Who does this decision-maker not want to upset? Voters in their district, a

BUILDING POLITICAL AND PEOPLE POWER

Step One 15-20 mins Group Activity	specific donor, a boss, a movement they're scared of? • **Influencers (funded by/answers to):** Who funds their campaign or their position? What institution do they report to? • **Allies**: Which organized groups (not individuals) already want this outcome? Do they have real capacity, or just alignment on paper? • **Opposition**: Who's organized against this, and what's their actual strength—money, numbers, media access, insider relationships?
Step Two 10 mins Group Discussion	• What's the actual moment this decision gets made — a vote, a public comment period, a budget deadline, a signature? • Given who's in the "influencers" boxes, what's the real lever—not what we wish worked, but what this specific person actually responds to? • Who in this room has a real relationship, not a cold contact, that reaches anyone on this map?
Step Three 10 mins Group Debrief	Each group shares their map briefly and names their identified pressure point and lever.

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