

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION GUIDE

MEDIA•2070

An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations





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AN INVITATION
TO DREAM UP
MEDIA REPARATIONS

REFLECTION &
DISCUSSION GUIDE

a project of Free Press

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MEDIA 2070 REFLECTION & DISCUSSION GUIDE

Media 2070: An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations is a 100-page essay documenting how anti-Black racism has been part of the U.S. media system since colonial times. The essay reveals the critical role that trafficking of enslaved Africans played in funding our nation's earliest media. The work traces this history to the present day, when deregulation has resulted in very few Black owners of traditional media, and racist algorithms amplify the voices of white supremacists across online platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Media 2070 also explores the history of Black media and resistance — as well as present-day efforts to hold newsrooms and tech companies accountable. The essay invites you to imagine a future where reparations are real — where accountability meets tangible investments, structural changes, and redistribution of resources and access as an act of repair for historical and ongoing harms.

We've created this reflection and discussion guide to support people who want to collectively confront the white-supremacist history of the U.S. media, with the goal of paving a way for reconciliation, repair and a future that centers the fullness and dignity of Black lives.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for all people who care deeply about the future of media, including journalists, teachers, community organizers, artists, activists and anyone else who wants to host a virtual conversation about anti-Black racism in the U.S. media — and imagine and build a better future. We envision conversations taking place virtually as well as in person within classrooms, newsrooms, living rooms, community centers and beyond.

When considering who to invite, consider folks who are building and dreaming in the realms of media, journalism, arts equity, racial justice, economic justice, reparations for slavery, African diaspora solidarity and liberation, and other movements for human rights and dignity.

How to use this guide

We encourage you to use this guide and its discussion questions in whatever way works best for your group. You don't need to read the entire essay prior to your conversation. Instead, you can ask folks to focus on individual sections of *Media 2070: An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations*, which is available as both a PDF and a digital flipbook at media2070.org.

Just a few questions should be enough to spark reflection and facilitate a rich discussion, so choose whichever ones you think will most resonate for you and your group. And feel free to create your own questions!

FACILITATION TIPS

Adapted from *Greensboro: Closer to the Truth*
Facilitation and Dialogue Guide

Media 2070: An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations can spur productive dialogue that is geared toward helping communities and media organizations move toward repair and reconciliation.

The content raises a range of themes that may trigger strong emotional reactions and trauma responses, so it's important to have these conversations in close, intimate spaces with people that you're in relationship with already. You can also have experienced facilitators — ideally people who are familiar with race-based dialogue — to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to process their feelings and be heard. We also highly recommend that facilitators represent the groups that are a party to the potential reconciliation or dialogue process; this will help promote fairness and bring necessary cultural competency to the dialogue.

The Media 2070 team is ready to support your hosting and facilitation. Just email us at racialjustice@freepress.net.

Initial considerations for facilitators

- As the facilitator, your job is to maintain equity, encourage people to explore sensitive issues, keep the space safe and keep the discussion on track and moving forward.
- Be radically hospitable. Survey attendees ahead of time to gather information on language and other accessibility needs. Prepare to engage participants with diverse backgrounds and disabilities by providing simultaneous interpretation on Zoom. When gathering in person, be sure to meet in wheelchair-accessible facilities with gender-neutral bathroom signage, an amplified microphone and other accommodations.
- While it's not necessary for attendees to read the essay before participating in reflection, we advise that facilitators endeavor to read *Media 2070* at least once before leading dialogue, and also consider reviewing the *Movement for Black Lives' Reparations Now Toolkit*. Be aware of your own “hot spots” — i.e., issues that evoke particularly strong emotions — and try to be sensitive to others' perspectives.
- Know your group. Power relations play out differently in different parts of the country and for various generations. Think about how those differences are reflected in language, comfort level in public discussions, and prior experience with issues of race and diversity. Be conscious of the various dynamics at play in any group: race, class, political affiliation,

gender, nationality and religion, among others. Consider ways to create a safe space and structure your conversation accordingly.

- Be expansive. Acknowledge that acts of journalism are often performed by people who may not identify as professional reporters or editors. These keepers of the story are vital to understanding community histories as well as the present. Encourage participants to explore ways to transform and disrupt harmful norms, institutions and habits of white supremacy. Go beyond the limitations of what seems possible now.

- Hold space for many voices. Reflection sessions should be interactive and equitable

experiences, where all voices are heard. These conversations should not function as gripe sessions or seminars devoted to explaining or defending the media business.

- Be prepared for criticism. You must be ready for emotional responses to the content or speakers; there is nothing wrong with this if the conversation stays on track. It is helpful to remind participants of the conversation's objectives and your overarching goals for community healing.

- Consider your time limitations and desired focus to determine how much of the essay you will discuss.

At the reflection circle

- Establish dialogue guidelines at the outset. Encourage participants to use “I” language: “I think that,” “I feel that,” “I believe that,” etc. Folks should speak from their own experiences as much as possible.

- Explain that you want this to be a space for grace and compassion where people can share their perspectives without fear of attacks or shaming. This should not be misconstrued as permission for white supremacy, but rather an invitation to accountability.

- It may be useful to regularly summarize the points that participants are making and acknowledge and honor the deep emotions that might surface. We suggest using Google docs, Padlet, a chalkboard, whiteboard or another online display that is visible throughout the conversation.

- Consider coming to an agreement with participants for what the dialogue’s objectives are. This could be as simple as asking people for ideas and noting their answers. Remember that prioritizing what participants want from the dialogue will help you return to those objectives if the discussion gets off track.

- For virtual gatherings via Zoom or another live-streaming platform, encourage participants to make themselves comfortable and attend to any personal physical needs during the gathering. If folks are able to be on-camera, that is ideal. For in-person gatherings, participants should be seated in a circle or some other formation so that they can see one another and feel included in the conversation. The facilitator should be a part of this arrangement as well.

- Establish the difference between dialogue and debate. Dialogue is an opportunity for people to share their experiences and opinions without trying to convince others that they’re right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and actively listening to each other. While finding common ground can be one objective of dialogue, acknowledging anger, passion and different viewpoints is also an important part of this process.

- If your group is larger than 20 people, consider breaking into smaller groups for more focused discussion. Ideally, it’s best to have a ratio of 1 facilitator to 10 people for conversation circles. If using Zoom, set up your conversation as a “meeting” (not a “webinar”) in order to access breakout group features.

- It’s useful and often powerful to have participants report back to the larger group about what they did and said in the small groups. Having someone take notes can help the group decide what to report back in the larger setting.

- During the dialogue, make references to stories and chapters from the essay, and prompt participants to consider how they relate to their own experiences. Use the discussion questions in this guide to move the conversation along and ensure that you hit on critical discussion points.

- Encourage people to think about how they will offer criticism; are there ways to say what they have to say respectfully and with care?

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DEFINING REPARATIONS

(Excerpted from the *Movement for Black Lives Reparations Now Toolkit*)

What are reparations?

The United Nations outlines five conditions that must be met for full reparations:

1. Cessation, assurances and guarantees of non-repetition: Under international law, a state responsible for wrongfully injuring a people is under an obligation to a) “cease the act if it is continuing, and b) offer appropriate assurances and guarantees of non-repetition...”
2. Restitution and repatriation: Restitution means to “re-establish the situation which existed before the wrongful act was committed.” Changes traced to the wrongful act are reversed through restoration of freedom, repatriation, and recognition of humanity, identity, culture, livelihood, citizenship, legal standing, and wealth to the extent they can be. If they cannot, restitution is completed by compensation.
3. Compensation: The injuring state, institution or individual is obligated to compensate for the damage, if damage is not made good by restitution. Compensation is required for “any financially accessible damage suffered...” to the extent “appropriate and proportional to the gravity of the violation and circumstances.”
4. Satisfaction: Satisfaction is part of full reparations under international law for moral damage, such as “emotional injury, mental suffering, and injury to reputation.” In

some instances where cessation, restitution, and compensation do not bring full repair, satisfaction is also needed. Apology falls under the reparative category of satisfaction.

5. Rehabilitation: Rehabilitation should include legal, medical and psychological components as well as other care and services.

What reparations are NOT

There has been a lot of confusion about what reparations are and what they are not. Some politicians have claimed that universal programs like baby bonds are reparations. They are not. Other people have claimed that individual GoFundMe campaigns for their own benefit are reparations. They are not.

As explored above, reparations include five key components: cessation/assurance of non-repetition; restitution; and repatriation, compensation, satisfaction, and rehabilitation. Reparations are a concept rooted in international law that involves specific forms of repair to specific individuals, groups of people, or nations for specific harms they have experienced in violation of their human rights. Therefore, reparations cannot be achieved simply through “acknowledgment or an apology” or “investment in underprivileged communities.”

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"Chicago Beach" by Edzed Photography

I. A Day at the Beach

THE STORY OF EUGENE WILLIAMS

1. When Eugene Williams was attacked, police on the scene arrested Black beachgoers instead of the white perpetrators. How does law enforcement shape media narratives around violent crime and racial uprisings?
2. After the Chicago unrest, local officials formed a commission on race relations. After the 1967 nationwide uprisings, then-President Lyndon B. Johnson convened the Kerner Commission. In both cases, the subsequently published study cited the media as a source of disinformation and a contributor to perceptions of Black people as generally criminal. What could a governmental intervention look like in response to contemporary global uprisings for Black lives?
3. How could the events on the beach and throughout the city have played out differently if reparations had been paid to formerly enslaved African Americans immediately following Emancipation? What could have been different for Eugene's parents? His family? Chicago's beaches? The police and the media?

II. Media 2070

AN INVITATION TO DREAM

For reflection: Journalism and other forms of media create the narratives that shift culture. Culture is the forest floor where policy either dies or flourishes. For that reason, media reparations are crucial to repair the harm the government caused via policies that created structural racism in the media industry — policies that have benefited white-controlled media institutions that in turn have defended, reinforced and upheld our nation's white-racial hierarchy.

1. What are some policies and practices — cultural, organizational or governmental — that benefit white-controlled media?
2. Imagine it's 2070. There's a world where Black people have received media reparations. It's been years since anyone's had to lobby for them. What do you no longer have to worry about? What is something new/expansive/joyous you get to participate in as a result of media reparations?

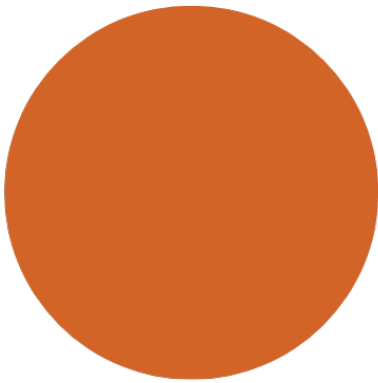
III. Modern Calls for Reparations for Slavery

FROM LEGISLATION TO ACTIVISM

For reflection: Requests and calls for reparations for the victims of U.S. chattel slavery and their descendants go all the way back to 1783 and have continued through each century. In 2020, presidential candidates including Sen. Cory Booker and then-Vice President Joe Biden have affirmed the need for federal action to study reparations.

1. Slavery reparations have been a topic since the late 1700s: The first formal record for reparations took place in 1783, when Belinda Royall petitioned the Massachusetts General Assembly to request a pension from the estate of her former enslaver and ended up receiving 15 pounds and 12 shillings. What is your perception of the fight for reparations?
2. In 1988, Congress passed legislation that compensated more than 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated in detention camps during World War II. They received a formal apology and \$20,000 each. How do you think reparations impacted these individuals and their families? What do you know about this process and its impact?
3. Why do you think the reparations conversation gained more traction in 2020?

For reflection: When enslaved people were executed, monetary compensation was provided to their traffickers/owners for loss of their chattel. On April 16, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill emancipating enslaved people, and paying traffickers/slaveowners who were loyal to the Union up to \$300 for every enslaved person freed.



IV. The Case for Media Reparations

ENVISIONING, CREATING AND PRACTICING A NEW MEDIA SYSTEM

For reflection: “We can’t mistake presence for power. Power is the ability to change the rules. Presence is not bad, but when we mistake presence for power, we can sometimes think something has happened that hasn’t actually happened.” —Color Of Change President Rashad Robinson

Facilitator note: The queries below are presented in the text of Chapter IV. These questions might be good for reflection at the end of your overall session, or after you’ve discussed the history and impacts of the media system’s anti-Black racism.

1. What would it look like if we had a media system where Black people were able to create and control the distribution of our own stories and narratives?
2. What would it look like if Black people had an abundance of Black-led news organizations serving our communities?
3. What if our stories were covered by journalists who understand and are a part of our communities?
4. What would it look like for Black people to create new narratives that humanize our communities rather than dehumanize us?
5. What would it look like if media policies ensured that Black communities had equitable ownership and control of our own local and national media outlets and over our own online media platforms?
6. What if our media system built autonomy and self-determination for resource-rich Black communities rather than extracting wealth for white media owners?

V. How the Media Profited from and Participated in Slavery

THE ORIGINAL SIN

1. How does the history of newspaper revenue streams relate to current media business models? What are some examples?
2. How has that history shaped the relationship between news publishers/editors and communities of color? What elements of that relationship exist today?
3. The trafficking of enslaved African people made it possible for the early colonists to spread the ideas of the American Revolution. What could this mean for the conversation today on governmental reparations for slavery?
4. How do today's newspapers and media profit from Black pain?
5. Edward E. Baptist, a Cornell University history professor, told *The Washington Post* in 2017 that runaway-slave ads were “the tweets of the master class” that served to “alert the surveillance system.” How do today's print, broadcast and social media function to alert society about the movements of people of color?
6. It's estimated that more than 200,000 slave ads were published in U.S. newspapers, many of which were later purchased by chains such as Advance Publications, Gannett and Tribune Publishing. How do you think this history manifests in present-day newsrooms? Should newspapers acknowledge and apologize for the harms caused?
7. How does the publication of slave ads compare to how today's news outlets criminalize Black people?



VI. The Power of Acknowledging and Apologizing

TOWARD REALIZING THE DEBT

For reflection: U.S. media have participated in racial terrorism in a variety of ways. In 1898, a North Carolina newspaper publisher led the nation's only armed overthrow of a local government. Outlets fueled the conditions for lynchings by portraying Black people — from the Groveland Four in 1949 to the Central Park Five in 1989 — as violent aggressors.

1. In your own life, how do you apologize for harm? What does an apology mean to you when you have been grievously harmed? What do you feel you deserve an apology for? How has the absence of an apology affected you?
2. *Media 2070* tells the stories of several newspapers that, in the past 15 years, have acknowledged and apologized for the role their outlets played in inciting anti-Black violence, siding with segregationists, or failing to cover the civil-rights movement. Are there episodes or practices in the history of your local media that merit an apology? How would you like news outlets to address harms they've inflicted on Black communities and others?

VII. Government Moves to Suppress Black Journalism

ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE THE MEDIA OF RESISTANCE

For reflection: During World War I, Congress passed the Espionage Act (1917) and the Sedition Act (1918), which criminalized free speech and attacked the press for criticizing the government's war efforts. Under these laws, officials imprisoned G.W. Bouldin, the Black publisher of *The San Antonio Inquirer*, and arrested Chandler Owen and legendary civil-rights and labor leader A. Philip Randolph, co-publishers of socialist publication *The Messenger*. During World War II, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover tried to convince U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle to bring sedition charges against the Black press after the *Pittsburgh Courier* launched the "Double V campaign" that called for victory in the war effort abroad and victory over racism at home.

1. What do you feel is the responsibility of the media during wartime?
2. Why would the Black press criticize the U.S. military?
3. How do you think this legacy of imprisonment and targeting has impacted the evolution of Black media? How has this impacted Black communities?
4. How has the history of racism in the news media shaped the development of the Black press?

VIII. Black People Fight to Tell Our Stories in the Jim Crow Era

DEFIANCE IN THE FACE OF WHITE MEDIA CONTROL

For reflection: *Media 2070* documents how the government awarded broadcast licenses to white-supremacist stations and an organ of the Ku Klux Klan. The essay also explores civil-rights leader Medgar Evers' fight to get airtime on a racist local TV news station to voice his opposition to segregationist policies. Two weeks after he was finally allowed to appear on WLBT-TV, Evers was assassinated in his own driveway.

1. How have the news media provided a platform for racist ideology, or silenced voices that oppose the white-centered status quo?
2. What are some of the conditions and dynamics inside white-led newsrooms that can result in these editorial and reporting decisions?
3. In the 1960s, a new agency within the Department of Justice, the Community Relations Service (CRS), was created to address racial tensions in the United States. The CRS faulted the media for perpetuating dehumanizing stereotypes of Black people and for failing to contextualize the demands of civil-rights activists. The agency also called on the media to diversify ownership and editorial ranks. How have today's news outlets covered the demands of current racial-justice movements? How are movements publicly defining their aims?

IX. Media Are the Instruments of a White Power Structure

THE 1968 KERNER COMMISSION REPORT
NAMES MEDIA'S ROLE IN SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION

For reflection: Racial uprisings took place across the country in 1967 in more than 150 cities. President Lyndon B. Johnson convened the Kerner Commission, which noted that the white press "repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America." Though it went largely unacknowledged by Johnson, the Kerner report is credited with pressuring the broadcast industry to integrate newsrooms, and boosted efforts for federal policies addressing institutional racism in the media industry.

1. Today, the ownership of broadcast stations and media outlets by people of color remains in the single-percentile range, and newsroom diversity has not improved in decades. What do you think needs to happen for more people of color to be in leadership positions at media outlets? How can we work together to support this vision? Has the federal government continued to support newsroom diversity?

X. The Struggle to Integrate Media

GOVERNMENT INTERVENES TO DISRUPT A HISTORY OF WHITE CONTROL

1. Why is it important for Black people, and other communities that have been marginalized and oppressed, to control their narratives? How can communities support Black control and ownership of journalism outlets and media narratives?
2. During its early years, two of the areas the Community Relations Service (CRS) focused on were integrating newsrooms and addressing the news media's role in inflaming racial tensions in the United States. What are other examples of federal intervention to improve conditions for oppressed people? How does today's public regard policy-driven media-diversity efforts? What has shifted?
3. The CRS provided support for a 1967 national conference involving media executives, civil-rights groups and Black and Latinx publications. By 1970, the CRS had helped initiate more than 20 such gatherings in cities nationwide. These gatherings gave civil-rights groups the chance to learn from experts on topics including ways to challenge a broadcast license and strategies to integrate newsrooms. How are newsrooms and outlets held accountable today? Do people in your community feel that they can hold their local media accountable? Who do your local media makers feel accountable to?
4. In 1978, the FCC created the minority tax-certificate program, which allowed broadcasters to receive a tax break if they sold their stations to people of color. In 1995, the Republican-controlled Congress passed legislation that ended the minority tax-certificate program, which had increased broadcast ownership by people of color from less than 1 percent to 3 percent. What is significant about these changes?

XI. How Public Policy Has Entrenched Anti-Blackness in the Media

For reflection: *“There used to be this really powerful legacy of Black talk radio. There were absolutely way more African American talk radio stations, African American-owned stations in previous years. And when the 1996 Telecommunications Act was passed, black-owned radio stations were gobbled up and kind of rolled into these massive, publicly traded companies. And so, that character of independently owned and city-by-city character was eliminated.”*

—Sara Lomax-Reese, president and CEO of WURD Radio, one of the few Black-owned talk-radio stations in the country

1. A 2019 study found that Black employees made up 12 percent of the TV-newsroom workforce, but remain underrepresented in leadership positions, making up just 5.5 percent of TV news directors and just 2.3 percent of general managers. How would coverage differ if there were more Black news leaders? How could this impact Black community members?
2. A 2017 study by Color Of Change and Family Story found that Black families represented 59 percent of coverage in news and opinion media about poverty even though they made up just 27 percent of poor families. How does this skewed overrepresentation affect public opinions of social-safety-net programs, like Medicaid and food assistance? How do these dynamics impact Black health and economic opportunity?
3. Describe the relationship between your local media outlets and Black communities. How can those relationships improve? What can you do to help?
4. In 2021, the Supreme Court rewarded the Trump FCC’s efforts to loosen media-ownership rules without any regard for their impacts on women and underrepresented racial groups. Meanwhile, runaway media consolidation, coupled with an economic crisis in the newspaper industry, have resulted in the layoffs of thousands of journalists. How does the loss of local reporting impact communities? How might ownership rules designed to increase Black participation have a positive impact on the entire industry?
5. While many media organizations boast of diversity, the American Society of News Editors — now known as the News Leaders Association — has been unable to produce a reliable study since 2017 because not enough news organizations have chosen to participate. Why might news organizations want to withhold data on staff diversity? What could change if they released this information?
6. What are possible metrics and other ways to measure transformation in newsrooms? How could competency and diversity and racial justice be evaluated and/or emphasized in newsroom staffing?
7. Hedge funds have increasingly assumed ownership of traditional media outlets. What does this mean for the news industry? For Black lives?

XII. White Media Power and the Trump Feeding Frenzy

FUELING THE RISE OF A TYRANT

For reflection: Media executives too often care more about maximizing profits than producing quality journalism. This has come at the expense of Black communities: Race is often covered as a spectacle, and coverage is filled with dog-whistle language that perpetuates the myth of Black inferiority. During the 2016 election season, media executives Les Moonves and Jeff Zucker openly rooted for the Trump presidential campaign as a ratings and revenue bonanza.

1. What role have the mass media played in the evolution of Donald Trump's public persona since the 1980s? What are some of the programs and stories that featured him, and what was the framing?
2. How has the media framing of race and racism changed in your lifetime? What is now acceptable, or no longer acceptable? What networks or personalities have driven these shifts?

XIII. Media Racism from the Newsroom to the Boardroom

HOW THE CYCLE CONTINUES

For reflection: Until 2018, big media and telecom companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon were members of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Through the years, ALEC crafted legislation for state lawmakers on voter suppression, greenhouse-gas emissions and repealing Obamacare, as well as stand-your-ground gun laws. While these companies are no longer members of ALEC, they are still hurting Black people with policies they've pressured the government to adopt.

1. As ALEC members, the big broadband companies pursued policies that prevented state legislatures from passing their own Net Neutrality bills to prohibit providers from suppressing certain content online. How has the free and open internet played a role in the movement for Black lives and other recent justice movements?
2. ALEC also successfully pushed for laws that ban local municipalities from building their own high-speed broadband networks. These laws have contributed to the digital divide, which disproportionately impacts Black people across all income levels. If the digital divide affects you, how has it impacted your life? How does the lack of affordable home-internet access affect people's ability to connect to employment, education and health care? Does your city have its own municipal broadband network?
3. With the 2019 merger of T-Mobile and Sprint, there are now just 3 major providers of mobile services in the United States. How does this impact consumers' ability to hold these companies accountable? What does this mean for pricing and competition? How does consolidation of the mobile market compare to consolidation within the news-media industry? What are the similarities and differences?

XIV. 2020: A Global Reckoning on Race

DEMANDING AN END TO ANTI-BLACK STATE VIOLENCE

1. The summer of 2020 saw the deepening of a coronavirus pandemic that is disproportionately fatal for Black people. Racial-justice uprisings during this period amplified longstanding calls to stop police brutality following a viral video of the public execution of George Floyd. How did your consciousness of racial oppression shift in 2020? How was your local community affected?
2. What stories did you see about Black people in 2020? In which ways have these stories impacted equity and justice in Black communities? In which ways have these stories created new harms?

XV. Upending White Supremacy in Newsrooms

JOURNALISTS OF COLOR LEAD THE WAY

For reflection: “It’s no coincidence that communities hurt by systemic racism only see journalists in their neighborhoods when people are shot or buildings burn down. It takes commitment to correct and improve that relationship. It is an insult to our work, our communities, and our neighbors to see that trust destroyed — and makes us that much more likely to face threats and aggression. The carelessness of our leadership makes it harder to do our jobs, and at worst puts our lives at risk.”

—Open letter from journalists of color to leaders at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

1. In 2018, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* Executive Editor Keith Burris wrote a column defending Trump’s racist comments on so-called “shithole countries” like El Salvador and Haiti. Burris argued that “calling someone a racist is the new McCarthyism.” What is significant about this comment?
2. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Wesley Lowery wrote “The views and inclinations of whiteness are accepted as the objective neutral.” What does this mean to you? What are the roles of “objectivity” and “neutrality” in journalism? How could these concepts impact aspiring and working journalists of color?
3. Public broadcasting (e.g., NPR and PBS) has also faced a reckoning. What is your perception of public broadcasters as news sources? What value does public broadcasting bring to society? What does it mean for the media landscape when certain public-broadcasting professionals have engaged in racism, sexism and harassment?

XVI. Are Newsrooms Ready to Make Things Right?

REPAIRING HARM AND REDISTRIBUTING POWER

For reflection: “The Kerner report didn’t call for ‘diversity.’ It called for US journalism to de-center its white male view.” —Janine Jackson, *Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR)*

1. In 2020, journalists of color rose up to protest racism at outlets including *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Explore the differences between the ways the various publishers and leaders responded.
2. Janine Jackson writes that, “The demand is not for more ‘diversity,’ but for less white supremacy.” What does this mean? Explore the differences between diversity, equity and justice. How does the idea of reparations relate to each?

XVII. The Struggles of Black Media Resistance

For reflection: “Black journalists put themselves on the front lines of these stories before and during the civil rights movement, doing the work and putting their bodies in danger so the sacrifices of activists would not go unnoticed.”

—Pioneering Black journalist
Dorothy Butler Gilliam

1. In 1957, L. Alex Wilson, editor of the *Tri-State Defender*, was beaten viciously with a brick by a white mob while covering the integration of Central High School in Little Rock. Photos of the attack reportedly spurred President Eisenhower to send 1,000 national guardsmen to Arkansas. In 2020, editors at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* told journalist Alexis L. Johnson that she was being removed from reporting on local racial uprisings because she was “biased.”
 - Why is it important for Black journalists to have equal opportunity to cover political and social stories? What does it mean when white editors are deciding who can report on issues of racial injustice? How is access to truthful reporting impacted?
2. Organizations like Color Of Change, Presente.org and Ultraviolet have run successful advertising boycotts targeting racist media personalities. Among the organizations’ wins are the firing of Bill O’Reilly from Fox News and the departure of Glenn Beck from the network. How do individuals like O’Reilly and Beck rise to prominence? Who are the activists and community leaders in your area fighting to hold media institutions accountable? What tactics have they used?
3. Have you ever seen or heard a Movement for Black Lives spokesperson or local racial-justice activist on your local news stations? What would happen in your community if local media reported on activists and their movements?

XVIII. Black Activists Confront Online Gatekeepers

TECH IS NOT NEUTRAL

For reflection: “Disinformation” is the dissemination of deliberately false information, especially messages concocted to glorify a leader or malign their enemies. Disinformation campaigns are often aimed at sharpening tribal divisions and sowing confusion or apathy.

1. By amplifying hateful content, tech corporations like Meta, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube provoke their users to ensure they stay engaged. Have you or someone you know received violent racist threats online? What is the correlation between the decline of newspapers with the rise of online disinformation? How can platform leaders be held accountable?
2. In testimony before Congress, media-justice expert Brandi Collins-Dexter said, “While the Internet has provided a means for decentralized media voices to breathe digital oxygen into emerging mobilization efforts, it has also given rise to new tech oligarchies and distortions of political thought.” How have social-media platforms benefited Black communities and other oppressed identities? What would happen if these platforms no longer existed? How has the experience of online platforms changed over the last 10 years? Are there alternatives to existing social-media platforms?
3. Violent hate groups are using social-media platforms to organize, recruit and raise funds — prompting the Change the Terms coalition to urge these companies to adopt model corporate policies to disrupt hate. Why have these companies been reluctant to remove violent content? Why are politicians largely excluded from the companies’ policies against hateful content and disinformation?

XIX. Media Reparations Are Necessary to Our Nation's Future

For reflection: We have a de-facto media-apartheid system where the vast majority of radio, TV, cable and broadband networks are white-owned and -controlled companies. To realize a true multiracial democracy we will need to dismantle this system.

1. In recent years, Black transgender journalists like Raquel Willis and Monica Roberts have made major strides in visibilizing Black transgender lives. What other voices are missing and erased from mainstream media narratives about Black people?
2. Sara Lomax-Reese of WURD Radio said, “Black-owned media ... is going away. If there aren’t things done at the national, state and local level, if there’s not stuff done from a corporate level, from a philanthropic level, these entities will go out of business.” Map out what you know about each of these sectors with ideas for how they could help revive Black media ownership.
3. From *Media 2070*: “As calls grow for federal funding to support local journalism, we should not simply prop up a commercial media system that is more accountable to its shareholders than to the people it is supposed to serve.”
 - a. What happens when the media are accountable to shareholders? How are newsroom culture and reporting impacted?
 - b. How does this differ from accountability to local communities?
 - c. How are local communities impacted when local reporting disappears?
 - d. What are alternative newsroom models you’ve seen or want to see that prioritize communities as stakeholders?
4. Go to p. 93 of the essay to read the ideas for media reparations proposed by activist James Forman in 1969, and the National African American Reparations Commission in 2015. What present-day initiatives or organizations do you know of that feel aligned with these proposals?

XX. Making Media Reparations Real

PAVING THE ROAD TO COLLECTIVE HEALING

For reflection: Media reparations can create journalism that's abundant with economic and racial equity.

1. What could media reparations for Black people look like?
2. Where do media reparations live within the greater struggle toward reparations?
3. How does the fight for media reparations and broad-based reparations in the United States exist in solidarity with global struggles for reparations and decolonization?
4. How do we ensure that Black people have control over the creation and distribution of our own narratives and stories? What opportunities are there for this to exist across various mediums of journalism, social media, technology and creative practice?
5. What infrastructure do we need to ensure that media reparations are made real and sustainable?
6. How do we create social-media algorithms and platforms that are emancipatory for Black people rather than predatory?
7. What would a new economy look like that fosters Black-community ownership of media outlets, platforms and networks that are noncommercial and accountable to serving our communities' news-and-information needs?
8. What role do media organizations play in ensuring reconciliation, repair and restoration for the community harms they've created or given voice to?
9. How can Black and Indigenous people, across ethnicities and tribal affiliations, work together to ensure that media reparations function hand in hand with decolonization efforts and other movements toward repatriation and the honoring of treaties with Indigenous people?

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

- What are you taking away from the conversations you just had?
- How does this discussion relate to your own life/work, and how are you thinking of addressing these issues moving forward?
- What can you commit to doing today that moves forward the acknowledgement, reconciliation and repair of anti-Black racism in the media?

CONTACT TEAM MEDIA 2070

Are there any additional questions or themes that came up in your discussion and reflection? Let us know so that we can share those with others who want to organize reflection and discussion groups. You can share your themes on social media (tag @Media2070) or send an email to us at racialjustice@freepress.net.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION GUIDE



AN INVITATION TO DREAM UP
MEDIA REPARATIONS

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