



MEDIA 2070: DREAMING UP MEDIA REPARATIONS

Few American institutions have so completely excluded minority group members from influence and control as have the news media. This failure is reflected by general insensitivity and indifference and is verified by ownership, management, and employment statistics. —U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service report, 1969

OVERVIEW

Conceived and led by the Black staff caucus at Free Press, [Media 2070](#) is an emergent multiracial consortium and campaign that advocates for reparations to the Black community for harms that media and tech companies have inflicted on Black lives throughout U.S. history. Media 2070 also calls on policymakers and philanthropists to redress policies and practices that have baked inequities into our media system. We see media reparations as both a process and a destination that build momentum for broader efforts around reckoning, restitution and racial healing.

The only media-reparations project in the United States, Media 2070 launched the effort in 2020 with [Media 2070: An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations](#), a 100-page essay that examines the history of anti-Black racism in the U.S. media system. The essay makes the case for media reparations and also prompts visions of what media equality and media justice would look and feel like. It was cited by the *Columbia Journalism Review* as among the best journalism covering race in 2020. Media 2070's growing consortium of 30 partners is organizing visionary events, making presentations, conducting press outreach and attracting widespread attention and praise.

This year we aim to join with communities and movements to revolutionize the public narrative on race and the media. Under the leadership of Alicia Bell, Joseph Torres and Collette Watson at Free Press, we'll build power, launch campaigns that hold newsrooms accountable, and advance reparations policies to radically transform who has the capital to tell their own stories by 2070.

THE YEAR 2070: OUR VISION

By 2070, Black people and communities have the resources, capital and power necessary to control distribution of our own stories from creation to production and distribution. We live in a fair and just democracy that values the stories and experiences of all people. And we remember a time when our conversation and action-taking around the media's harm to Black communities became a powerful lever that helped bring the fight for reparations out of the niches of social-change spaces and into our political and cultural mainstreams. Reparations have become widely seen as necessary to create a thriving democracy and society in the United States. **At Media 2070, we are ready to tell this story.**

RACISM IN THE MEDIA

Amid a reckoning generations in the making, Black people impacted by systemic oppression are yet again demanding that America's institutions grapple with their histories of perpetuating white-supremacist violence. Anti-Black racism has been part of the media system's DNA since colonial times. When the first newspapers were published, reading and writing were illegal for many Black people. Media institutions were complicit in the slave trade and profited off of chattel slavery — with newspapers publishing an estimated 200,000 runaway-slave ads. Racist journalism led to countless lynchings. Southern broadcast stations aired vociferous opposition to integration. When the U.S. government first distributed free broadcast licenses, they went only to white men.

Racist stereotypes and disinformation spread by modern media and tech companies are a direct continuation of these historical practices. U.S. public policy has failed to address the systemic problem of white supremacy in the media, compounding the harms to Black people today. Black people own and control less than 1 percent of our nation's full-power TV stations — only 12 stations in our entire country. Black journalists make up just 5.6 percent of all newsroom staffers at daily publications and online news sites and are severely underrepresented in leadership positions across the news industry. This lack of power and voice results in biased news: Media coverage that distorts and stereotypes communities of color leads directly to punitive policies and practices that disproportionately and negatively impact our lives — and erases our humanity.

STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

[Media 2070](#) honors and builds on a long history of reparations and justice work. Our focus on media — and newsrooms in particular — offers an on-ramp for people to understand and support reparations overall. Media 2070 organizes around four strategies to move through the reckoning, accountability, acknowledgement and redress that reparations require. We:

- **Center the voices of those most impacted.** We unite activists and communities with newsrooms and media-makers to visibilize harmful norms in reporting practices. And we co-create narratives that showcase our communities' futures on the other side of harm. For example, our [#BlackFutureHeadlines](#) tweetstorm generated possible futures like: "Black Independent Media Makers Create Storytelling and Community Education Network for BIPOC Youth," and "Juneteenth is a federally recognized holiday."
- **Use education as a tool for liberation.** We engage journalists, students, educators, policymakers and culture workers on the media's role in amplifying racial injustice. We explore possibilities for change through efforts like [Black Narrative Power](#), a month of virtual convenings around what a future ripe with Black joy and self-determination could look like. We also present to audiences ranging from the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication to North Carolina Freedom Summer.
- **Move in solidarity.** Through our growing 30-member consortium, we foster collaboration among media-makers, artists, technologists, advocates, policymakers and scholars to build relationships, increase power, cultivate inspiration and transform media. The consortium includes longtime media activist Janine Jackson of FAIR MediaWatch, Peabody Award-winning podcaster and scholar Chenjerai Kumanyika, movement-journalism leader Manolia Charlton and MediaJustice founder Malkia Devich-Cyril.
- **Generate policy interventions.** We develop resources and proposals in alignment with both the Black radical tradition and our visions for new media realities — including Black media power — alongside the interventions that get us there. We organize people and campaigns to win concrete and lasting changes. Currently, we are working with Rep. Jamaal Bowman to petition the Federal Communications Commission to study the [history of systemic racism](#) at the agency.

OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

In 2021, Media 2070 is setting out to revolutionize the national conversation on race and media, spark reparative interventions in newsrooms, and increase political space for federal legislation on media reparations. In the year ahead, we'll:

Popularize Media Reparations. To strengthen public support for repair of anti-Black harms in the media system, we'll facilitate political education and share Media 2070 ideas far and wide. We'll create a reflection guide and support discussion circles on the [Media 2070](#) essay. To expand the essay into a living archive with additional content, we'll use research and crowd-sourced data to curate a digital People Powered Timeline of media and tech companies' harm to Black lives, up to and including the present day. We'll also organize [gatherings](#) on topics like the history and lineage of Black narrative power, and invite participants to share their dreams for media reparations. To elevate these visions for a world and media ecosystem free of anti-Black violence, we'll launch social-media and digital action-taking campaigns and shape debate about media reparations via videos, press releases and [media outreach](#). And we'll present to and engage numerous audiences in the journalism field and across social- and racial-justice movements, as well as in academic settings.

Build Power for Change: The Media 2070 Consortium. Media reparations is about grappling with and naming the harms of the past and present, but it's also about building the future we deserve. To get there, we are forming an active consortium abundant with racial-justice organizers, academics, journalists and media-makers of color. We currently have 30 consortium partners and aim to grow to 60 by the end of 2021. Cohorts within the consortium will develop policy proposals, articulate the future of media, and push for newsroom acknowledgement and transformation. In the year ahead, we'll co-host [webinars](#) and [national conversations](#) on media reparations with partners including the Action Center for Race & Economics, MediaJustice, the Movement for Black Lives, the News Integrity Initiative at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism and Storyline Partners.

Hold Newsrooms Accountable. From *The Los Angeles Times* to *The Kansas City Star*, newsrooms are beginning to move beyond talking about "diversity" and toward [truth-telling and apologies](#). But the vast majority of our nation's newsrooms have yet to examine their archaic and biased journalistic values, harmful newsgathering practices and histories of racist coverage. Media 2070 will use a two-pronged approach with newsrooms. We'll call out biased reporting and pressure newsrooms to address their shortcomings when it comes to their coverage of diverse communities and their own institutional diversity-and-equity issues. Alongside Free Press colleagues working on the News Voices project to transform local journalism, we'll create [reporting guides for journalists that center pro-Black narratives](#), train newsrooms on the history of media racism and reparative practices, and [collaborate with newsrooms and communities](#) to center community needs in local news.

Dream a New Dream: Reparations Policies. To foster Black media infrastructure and build the media system and the democracy we deserve, we must redress harm to the Black community, which will require actions and resources over and beyond any one media institution. We'll work with policymakers in Washington, starting with the FCC, to study how government policies have created media inequality and harm for communities of color. We'll also develop a media-reparations policy agenda and build grassroots- and grassstops-advocacy campaigns around it.

In Congress, we'll focus on advancing existing legislation like the reparations proposals included in H.R. 40, as well as policies on key media-and-tech issues like closing the digital divide, restoring Net Neutrality, curbing unwarranted government surveillance, reducing online hate and disinformation, and diversifying media ownership. We'll conduct

outreach to decision-makers, organize policy briefings on Capitol Hill, and produce fact sheets and other educational resources for lawmakers.

THE MEDIA 2070 LEADERSHIP TEAM

- **Collette Watson, Vice President of Strategy and Culture**, guides narrative change, community partnerships and strategic communications, working with artists, media-makers, creatives and advocates to shift power toward a just future media system.
- **Joseph Torres, Senior Director of Strategy and Engagement**, advocates in Washington to ensure that our nation's media policies serve the public interest and builds allied coalitions to broaden the movement's base. The Media 2070 project builds on *News for All the People*, the *New York Times* bestselling book he wrote with Juan González.
- **Venneikia Williams, Media 2070 Campaign Manager**, Venneikia supports the Free Press team in the development, design and successful implementation of the Media 2070 campaign for media reparations.

Media 2070 is supported by the entire Free Press staff, especially News Voices: Philadelphia Project Manager Tauhid Chappell and News Voices: Colorado Manager Diamond Hardiman.

MEDIA 2070 BUDGET

The 2-year project budget for Media 2070 is \$1,070,000, aligned with the 2022–2023 calendar years. Year-one expenses are projected to total \$500,000 and year-two expenses are estimated at \$570,000. Expenses support the core Media 2070 team, consultants, communications, convenings and campaigns. A detailed project budget is available upon request. Our allied 501c4 organization, Free Press Action, will carry out any grassroots and direct lobbying activities. The combined 2021 organizational budget for Free Press and Free Press Action is \$6,000,000.

Thank you for your interest. Free Press is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit that fights for everyone's rights to connect and communicate. We are actively seeking philanthropic partners to anchor Media 2070. For conversation and more information, contact Collette Watson (cwatson@freepress.net, 803-269-9577) or Free Press Co-CEO Jessica J. González (jgonzalez@freepress.net, 310-809-2577).