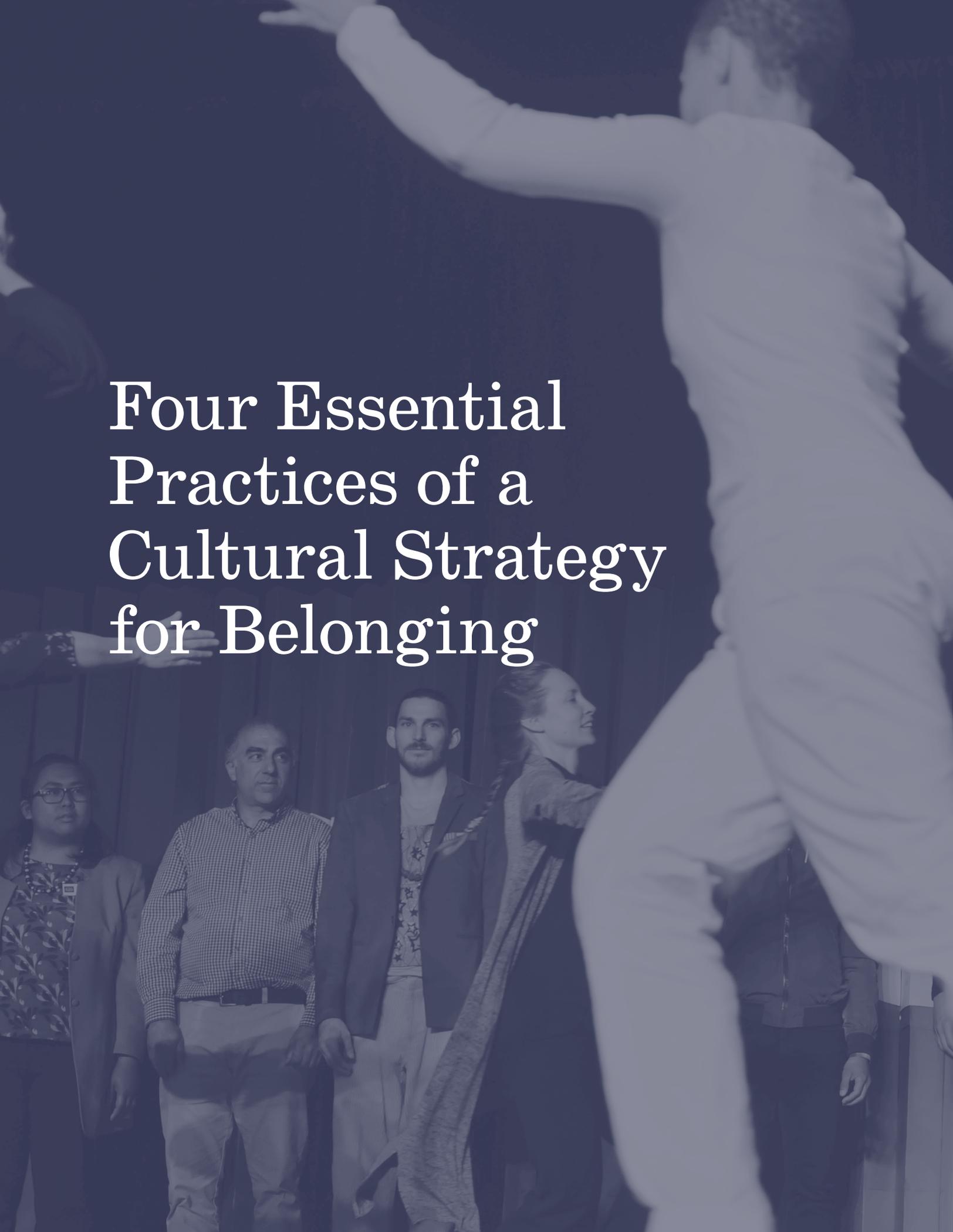


# Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging

Evan Bissell



A group of diverse people in a professional setting, with a large figure in the foreground reaching out. The image is overlaid with a dark blue filter. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

# Four Essential Practices of a Cultural Strategy for Belonging



# 1

Cultivate vibrant and diverse forms of cultural practice that support the growth of leadership and practice of those directly and deeply impacted by systems of oppression.

# 2

Amplify the knowledge, insight and vision that comes through culture and cultural production and create containers and experiences where this knowledge, insight and vision can be expressed and understood on its own terms.

# 3

Align with efforts for material, political, and social change.

# 4

Make social and cultural change into a new “common sense.”

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## About the Author

Evan Bissell facilitates participatory art and research projects that support equitable systems and liberatory processes. He is the Arts and Cultural Strategy Coordinator at the Haas Institute.

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## On the Cover

Reflections of Healing  
Collaborative Community Project,  
by Brett Cook. Little Bobby  
Hutton Power Figure Oakland  
Museum Installation. 9' X 20'  
Paint pen, oil pastel, spray  
enamel, acrylic, multi media on  
wood with Bobby Hutton Quote/  
Black Panther Party point No.  
10 Collaboratively colored in  
Amharic, Vietnamese, Spanish,  
Korean, Arabic, and Chinese  
2012.

*Reflections of Healing is a multi-faceted process of community building that includes the collaborative development of large-scale public installations featuring Bay Area residents whose practice or legacy demonstrate dimensions of healing. The project catalyzes partnerships between diverse and under-resourced communities, and residents through temporary and permanent actions across Oakland, CA. Reflections anchors LIFE is LIVING (LIL), a national initiative that establishes a new model for partnerships between diverse and under-resourced communities, green action agencies, and the contemporary arts world.*

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# Foreword from the Director

Philosopher and friend Iris Young famously identified five major “faces of oppression” that thwart our efforts in advancing justice and fairness. Of the five possible overarching themes of oppression she identified, including exploitation, powerlessness, and violence, one of the five was **culture**. Culture, she argued, is one of the five primary, foundational forces that can be utilized against people. When a dominant group of people want to subordinate or control another group, one of the first things they do is try to take away peoples’ language, their religion, their food—in other words, their culture. And they work to enforce that of the dominant culture as the “norm.”

Culture is essential to our survival. It is not an overstatement for me to say that I would not be where I am today without having access to music. The music of Nina Simone and John Coltrane enabled me to get through my undergraduate experience as a black student in a predominantly white institution. Music was where I went to experience and find belonging in a place where I didn’t experience it through a variety of signals and structures.

Culture plays a vital role in understanding what it means to be human and our particularly human needs. Culture does not just talk to the conscious, it feeds the spirit. We are meaning-making, spiritual animals, and the spiritual part is transmitted through culture. Culture has taught us the power of seeing ourselves interconnected in a web of mutuality, as Dr. King put it.

Our interconnection is a key element for understanding the power of culture, as culture is a deeply social phenomenon. The ability to tell stories and create collectively is what scientists believe allowed our species, *homo sapiens*, to evolve. Stories and myths helped give us a new self and create new relationships as we built cooperation across thousands of people, rather than small or singular tribes.

Culture speaks to the conscious and the subconscious. It helps unite the heart and the mind. The information that culture transmits moves extremely fast, largely in ways we are not aware of. Culture signals in a way that is direct and experiential. And culture is in constant movement and interaction



Author, cultural critic, and feminist bell hooks, with John Powell at the inaugural Othering & Belonging Conference, 2015. Photo by Eric Arnold.

with us all, whether we recognize it or not. It's a foundational part of how we make meaning as human beings. And what this report does is attempt to name and expand our understanding of how we can utilize culture as a site of change, as author Evan Bissell explains.

Culture is neither purely positive or negative. Too much of the world has been organized around a belief in the ideology of whiteness, with the need to dominate and control. This expression of whiteness is at its most foundational not a material belief, it's about culture. For too long the story of whiteness has been a story about being special, about individualism and separation—being separated from God, from nature, and even oneself. And a central component of the story of whiteness has also been about fear. So it lives in constant anxiety. But while the ideology of whiteness is a myth, the belief in it produces real outcomes that affect everyday lives.

So we need new stories. Stories where people who are not white heterosexual men don't show up as less than, as the “other.” Stories that reject

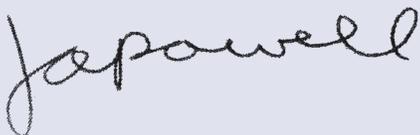
a re-assertion of an idea that who belongs should be organized around race, blood, or phenotype.

Culture can move people in a way that policies cannot. People largely organize themselves and operate around stories and beliefs, not around facts. And they organize more around love and belonging than shame and fear. So in constructing our new we, we need to be careful not to replicate ways of what I call breaking.

Building a culture of belonging is not the same as simply removing barriers. We must also organize our spaces, our structures, and our policies to do the work we need to build the world we want to live in. We have to work together to build a well-developed ecosystem that supports our work. We need research and analysis, we need inclusive narratives, and we need organizing, which is about building power. And we need all these things activated and in alignment—and all of these move through culture.

Developing our new story will take a lot of work. As illustrated in this report, there are many rich cultural histories to learn from as well as many emergent expressions to which we can look to for inspiration and aspiration. These *Notes* delve into the ways that artists, culturemakers, and community leaders are anchoring work in cultural expressions that celebrate our differences and provides models on how arts and culture can create space for more fully realizing that which we share.

A culture of belonging recognizes that we are always in a state of dynamic action and reaction. Belonging is never done and will constantly have to be remade. We're in the midst of constructing new ways to see and new ways to be. This is not always comfortable, but it is part of our human experience. As we move forward together in this time of rapid and concentrated change, the work of arts and culture will play a major role in how we lean into a future that says to everyone: You belong. We hope this report will provide some ideas for understanding some of the vital and visionary aspects of a cultural strategy for belonging.



john a. powell, Director  
Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society  
Professor of Law, African American, and  
Ethnic Studies

**Culture is not just about constructing a singular set of things or policies, as important as those are. People largely organize themselves and operate around stories and beliefs, not around facts and information.**

# Introduction

## Culture and Belonging

In the weeks leading up to the pivotal midterm elections in 2018, young organizers in contested districts in California were finalizing details of unconventional Get Out The Vote actions through a program called the Cultural Ambassadors Fellowship.<sup>1</sup> In Fresno, Jazz Diaz, who was one of the program's Fellows, made paper by hand and embedded the seeds of flowers that grow on both sides of the US/Mexico border within it. She was working with Fellow Yenedit Valencia to host a workshop that was part printmaking and part traditional Oaxaqueño dance. The resulting notes and prints on the seed paper were then shared with new voters by door-to-door canvassers with the youth organization 99Rootz.

Meanwhile in Orange County, fellow ambassadors Jesus Santana and Alba Piedra were finalizing a workshop activity about flags and their relationship to land and identity. In this workshop participants created flags that represented visions of a just and equitable California, which then became the basis for voter information pamphlets to be used by young Get Out the Vote canvassers working with the organization Resilience Orange County. And on the outside of a free election day shuttle van, fellows Yacub Hussein and Haadi Mohamed completed images that connected the story of contemporary San Diego immigrants with those of civil rights and farmworker organizers from a half century before. With the group Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans, Yacub and Haadi drove members of their neighborhood to the polls who had indicated they otherwise might not have been able to get there. This work connected them to a history of community organizing and leadership that continually expands our notions of **who belongs**.

These projects, organized with the group Power California, were part of a larger umbrella of efforts

from the Haas Institute's Blueprint for Belonging (B4B) program, which works to develop and expand narratives in California that are more reflective of the state's diverse demographic makeup. Their approach is driven by the foundational othering and belonging framework of the Haas Institute, which understands that creating a more fair and inclusive society requires engaging culture as a critical component of transforming systems and social narra-

**A culture of belonging must inhabit stories, symbols, and how we see ourselves and each other. It also must inhabit the systems, policies and practices of society that make up the substance of culture.**

tives. Organizers and artists ground their visions of belonging in cultural roots, practices, and frames, and then use this grounding to create processes that reflected belonging while mobilizing new and underrepresented voters. As the Cultural Group wrote, "We change culture through culture. That means that culture is both the agent of change and the object of change."<sup>2</sup>

In a foundational article called *The Problem of Othering*, the Haas Institute's John A. Powell and Stephen Menéndez describe belonging as, "An unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference but to ensuring that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society."<sup>3</sup> They continue that this, "must be more



Oaxacan dance workshop in Sanger, California. This was one part of a Cultural Ambassadors Get Out The Vote project led by 99Rootz fellows Yenedit Valencia and Jazz Diaz. Photo by Pacita Rudder, 2018.

than expressive; it must be institutionalized as well.”<sup>4</sup> A culture of belonging must inhabit stories, symbols, and how we see ourselves and each other. It also must inhabit the systems, policies and practices of society that make up the substance of culture.<sup>5</sup>

The transformative potential of working towards a culture of belonging lies in the details. As journalist and critic Masha Gessen notes, a favorite strategy of fascist leaders is the weaponization of narrow definitions of cultural belonging along lines of race and ethnicity.<sup>6</sup> Class, gender, sexuality, and ability have all been and are still being weaponized and manipulated in similar ways. This is the opposite of belonging, this is othering. This othering happens at multiple scales—national, religious, neighborhood, identity, and more. Across the political spectrum, from the work of the Culture Group<sup>7</sup> to writer/provocateur Andrew Breitbart,<sup>8</sup> the argument has been made that culture is an essential and sticky site of change. It is not enough to just ask, to what end are we creating a culture of belonging? We must also ask: Who belongs? How is belonging created? What are we seeking to belong to? How are we participating in advancing or narrowing that belonging? Identifying, amplifying and cultivating aspects of culture that make real a world in which many worlds fit<sup>9</sup>, is the seed of cultural strategy.

## A Cultural Strategy for Belonging

While cultural strategy has long existed and in numerous forms, there has been more focused contributions in recent years to name, guide, and expand on the work. In a report commissioned by Power California, *Cultural Strategy: An Introduction and Primer* (2019), author Nayantara Sen defined cultural strategy as, “A field of practice and learning which engages all aspects of cultural life and all avenues of social change making to transform society for a just, viable, and liberatory future.”<sup>10</sup>

Building on this definition, a **cultural strategy for belonging** centers the leadership, voices, storytelling, practices, and knowledge of people and communities who have been the target of oppressive ideologies and systems. A **cultural strategy for belonging** shifts whose knowledge and vision is made actionable in reshaping society. This grows the cultural power of those dehumanized and delegitimated towards the creation of insistent human belonging, justice, and liberation.

Valuing oneself, one’s culture, and one’s community, even in the face of violent negation and devaluation, is at the core of a cultural strategy for belonging. As

Yenedit Valencia shared, “I feel that once we know where we come from, where our parents come from, what language we speak, what are our cultural practices, our values, there is no going back...once you know who you are, there’s just no going back.”

Forged through love, resistance, survival, joy, and continuity, these acts complicate, disrupt, and transform narrow conceptions of who belongs that are defined through exclusion and othering. Audre Lorde wrote, “As a Black lesbian mother in an interracial marriage, there was usually some part of me guaranteed to offend everybody’s comfortable prejudices of who I should be. That is how I learned if I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive.”<sup>11</sup> Working towards a culture of belonging means celebrating and supporting Lorde’s self-definition, while working to abolish the violence she names. A cultural strategy for belonging creates the conditions and infrastructure to cultivate, amplify, and connect these stories and practices in the midst of continued othering.

## Underpinnings of a Cultural Strategy for Belonging

This report responds to and builds off the work of many others and the influences that underpin it are wide-ranging. What follows is a rough and incomplete inventory of traces that make up influences and practices of cultural strategy. Much of this work is relational and based in over a decade of work with sectoral trespassers. Paramount are the hybrid practices of people from whom I have learned directly, including Gina Athena Ulysse, Brett Cook, Una Osato, Julia Steele Allen, Morgan Basichis, Jenny Lee, Nate Mullen, Dania Cabello, Ora Wise, and Roberto Bedoya. It also includes spaces like the Allied Media Conference and Creative Wildfire, hosted by Movement Generation.

A variety of written works have also provided a theoretical grounding. Paolo Freire and bell hooks’ collection of works on pedagogy play a central role in guiding the approach to practice. Robin D.G. Kelley’s *Freedom Dreams* explores the tradition of the Black Radical Imagination, raising essential questions about how cultural practice and cultural resistance is entangled with positionality, history,

and other efforts of radical social change. Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* is a formally mixed-genre approach to theory that challenges notions of expertise and frames identity and culture as key sites of resistance. Audre Lorde’s collection of essays and poems *Sister Outsider* broadens the lens of analysis within the context of Black feminisms and crystallizes the power inherent in cultural and artistic work. Winona LaDuke’s *Recovering*



A 2019 Othering & Belonging conference attendee reads through the map of places of belonging created by Haas Institute Artist in Residence Christine Wong Yap and dozens of conference attendees. Photo by Eric Arnold.

*the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* chronicles Native American efforts to reclaim sacred cultural elements and their relationship to place to illuminate the deep importance of culture as a site of change. Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, is a historical analysis of the role of cultural production in orientalism and colonialism, building off of frameworks of hegemony formulated by Antonio Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks*.

Efforts to clarify what cultural strategy is, and what it is not, can be drawn from a number of works and activities. The *Principles of Media-Based Organizing* are central to the 20-year efforts of Allied Media Projects to center a wide definition of media-making in radical social change. EastSide Arts Alliance is an important standard within the Bay Area, carrying their work with a consistency and continuity that reflects a long-term praxis. The

# This paper is for storytellers, artists, organizers, cultural strategists, producers, funders, and collaborators who are working to develop cultural strategy with intention and rigor to increase impact.

work of CultureStrike (now the Center for Cultural Power) features centrally within this field, including their 2019 Concept Paper, *Culture is Power*. In *Making Waves* (2014), the Culture Group laid out a foundational argument for cultural strategy as named, drawing on historical examples and emphasizing the essential role of culture in social change. The aforementioned *Cultural Strategy: An Introduction and Primer* by Nayantara Sen is an excellent illumination of cultural strategy, offering a layered and detailed framework for funders, cultural strategists, and organizational leaders.

Another thread of works focus on arts-based and cultural organizing tactics that contribute to the “how” of discrete project implementation and development. *Cultural Tactics* (2016) by the Design Studio for Social Innovation offers three cultural tactics derived from their projects. *The Center for Artistic Activism* website hosts a variety of tools, interviews and materials that explore the intersection points of art and activism and how to strengthen these to deliver “affect” (a combination of affect and effect). *Beautiful Trouble* also offers a catalogue of online resources to support practitioners. This is hardly an exhaustive review.

This report is also informed by the Haas Institute’s guiding framework of othering and belonging. This framework views culture as a core element of the work of remediating othering and advancing belonging. Many of the cultural strategy projects and characteristics explored here come through the practices and a growing infrastructure at the Institute infusing arts and cultural strategy. In this work, the Haas Institute leverages its cross-sector and interdisciplinary nature to host diverse and varied convenings, research projects, fellowships, and multimedia platforms that deeply integrate arts and culture. This report responds to those efforts, learn-

ings from staff workshops on cultural strategy, and is created in close partnership with my colleague Rachelle Galloway-Popotas.

## Where this paper is going

This paper is for storytellers, artists, organizers, cultural strategists, producers, funders, and collaborators who are working to develop cultural strategy with intention and rigor to increase impact. It is primarily meant for people who have some experience in the field as a way to deepen these efforts.

Like many cultural strategy practices, *Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging* doesn’t fit well into one box—it is a bit theory, a bit case study, a bit recommendation, and a bit workshop. It outlines a what, how, and why of a cultural strategy for belonging, while also looking to next steps.

In the first section, I detail attributes (**WHAT**) and practices (**HOW**) of a cultural strategy for belonging. In the second section, I look at **WHY** a cultural strategy for belonging works to create a more authentic and expansive belonging. This section focuses on the dynamic and everyday nature of culture, as well as the unique way that cultural strategy catalyzes change despite highly unequal economic, political, and social power. In the third section, I look to next steps. I outline three guideposts that can help to avoid cultural strategy staying only in the symbolic realm of change and how to build a stronger infrastructure for our work. Next, I offer recommendations for funders, researchers, and organizational leaders. Finally, I present a workshop derived from previous collaborations with organizers, activists, policy advocates, and researchers to develop creative cultural strategy approaches to their work.

# Attributes and Essential Practices

In the work of social, economic, and cultural transformation, what are the unique attributes of a cultural strategy for belonging? How are these attributes made real in practice? As an artist, researcher, organizer and educator engaged in cultural strategy, I seek to create processes that access what the surrealist, anti-colonial writer Aimé Césaire called “poetic knowledge” or “experience as a whole”.<sup>12</sup> This is essential for expanding our collective, sustainable efforts towards justice and belonging through insisting on the inherent humanity of all people and concern for the earth and all living creatures. Cultural strategy can—and should—expand our epistemology by making knowledge that is generally excluded from social change, essential to research, advocacy, organizing, and living. This knowledge is frequently delegitimized because of who is producing it—queer people, poor people, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, people with disabilities—or the form it takes—folk knowledge, family stories, belief systems, songs, experiences, emotions and expressions. In the opening lines of the essay *Poetry is not a Luxury*, Audre Lorde explored how the quality of analysis that comes from poetic knowledge is essential:

*“The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless—about to be birthed, but already felt.”<sup>13</sup>*

The attributes of a cultural strategy for belonging can shift the quality of our analysis. This changes the possibilities and boundaries of belonging through new forms of scrutiny, research, and creation. This bears on both the process and outcomes of social change efforts.

# Attributes of a Cultural Strategy for Belonging

The following 12 attributes of cultural strategy are a palette. These attributes clarify the unique contributions of a cultural strategy for belonging. They can also guide the development of cultural strategy projects. At a minimum, these can be assessed against the needs of a project that is looking to integrate cultural strategy. Ideally, this assessment occurs early in the analysis of a need or problem as a way to shift the “quality of light” of analysis. Each attribute is generated from an analysis of case studies of our work at the Haas Institute, as well as art and cultural projects that have inspired this work.



**For a workshop on working with these and additional examples related to each attribute see the Appendix.**

## Insisting on humanness

James Baldwin wrote, “The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place.”<sup>14</sup> When the forms and functions of this world are defined by profit, violence, consolidation of power and othering, we are left with a dwelling place at the edge of collapse, one where humanness is narrowly defined and widely delegitimated.

The vulnerability, subjectivity, fragility, and sacredness of an insistence on the dignity and humanity of all people undergirds an authentic belonging. Politics, research, and law can lack the agility to convey or acknowledge the complexity of this humanness. Humanness makes things complicated, imperfect, and slower. Without attention to all of these parts, we stand the risk of creating limited solutions that force us to exclude parts of our selves or our communities in pursuing statistics that reflect progress. For example, the push for prison reform for “good” criminals is predicated on a solidifying of the image of “bad” criminals, flattening their humanity and the history that has produced the prison system. People don’t identify or see themselves in statistical terms or a politically convenient dataset—art and cultural strategy can keep our work *insistently human*, which means we are strengthening belonging through process and outcome over the long-term. People see themselves in the work and so they return—again and again. This focus on our shared humanity adds urgency and relevance to campaigns and narrative change efforts.



Emily Jacir, *Where We Come From (Hana)*, 2001-2003. Chromogenic print and laser print mounted on board; variable San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund purchase © Emily Jacir

## WHERE WE COME FROM

Emily Jacir

Born in Palestine and holding a US passport, Jacir used the power of movement afforded by her citizenship to perform simple, intimate tasks for Palestinians living in exile. She asked Palestinian people in exile, “If I could do anything in Palestine for you, what would it be?” Jacir then carried out these actions and documented them with simple snapshots. Here, she was asked to, “Go to Haifa and play soccer with the first Palestinian boy you see on the street.” The work uses these intimate exchanges to bring an intractable global political issue down to the level of human longing and connection—and reveals the power of her US citizenship as well. The acts are not overtly political, but they reveal, in very human ways, the disruptions of life that come from displacement through colonization.

## Prologue

Based on the Gary family story, 1952

Dear Ciera,  
We write this with a longing heart  
the journey you are embarking on  
is one of horrific tradition  
and our life is your testimony  
is your roadmap to justice  
is your proof of the matter.  
We write because we admire the stories  
unfolding amongst these pages,  
you might call us blown away  
by their honesty and the fact  
that the fight has yet to cease  
in this beloved city.  
Listen, Richmond was the home  
we fought the hardest for.  
We made a home in between Kaiser shipyards and a war zone,  
one Black house on an all white block.

Against ghostly men,  
out for Black blood, we,  
a mass of races gathered  
weaving together our place of refuge  
and now we pass the torch  
through this letter.  
If you stand your ground long enough,  
you might see the shadow of the cross burning  
on our lawn, as it fades away.  
Don't grow weary.  
This story is merely a symbol, a note,  
perhaps a scriptures all the more,  
saying that this too  
shall pass.

8 Walking Testimonies



1935 Federal Housing Authority Loan Underwriting Manual: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes."  
Photo: Richmond Independent, March 5, 1952

Ciera-Jevae Gordon, 2017

### WALKING TESTIMONIES Ciera-Jevae Gordon

In a Richmond, California city council meeting in 2015, a councilmember who opposed rent control implored the audience to not listen to the few dozen community-member testimonies that were shared that evening. Instead he asked the public to pay attention to the facts that he had presented as the only valid form of expertise in deciding how the policy should be evaluated. In response to this and other dominant narratives around housing challenges in Richmond, the Staying Power Fellowship was formed, a cultural strategy project focused on housing and belonging in Richmond, co-created by the Haas Institute together with community members in Richmond and three local organizations. Out of that program a cohort of Richmond-based fellows developed a series of poems based on interviews with residents who had been impacted by the housing crisis. These poems were read at city council meetings and housing workshops throughout the city. In one piece, Staying Power fellow DeAndre Evans,

referring to data presented on housing displacement in Richmond, posed the question: "How many of us aren't statistics?" A selection of the poems was compiled together with visuals and facts about the history of housing injustice and published in a booklet entitled *Walking Testimonials* (see excerpt on this page). This work serves as an urgent reminder, rendered through culture, that the question of housing can't only be encapsulated in statistics and surveys—it includes histories of place, words, smells, sounds, temperature. The book of poems was distributed alongside an accompanying research and policy report published by the Haas Institute. By giving equal footing to resident stories and experiences, the project insists on a human frame, which gives texture, complexity, nuance, and power to a vision of belonging, particularly when one's ability to be seen as human and as belonging has been systematically denied.

# 2

## Reclaiming cultural memory

At a conference on housing justice in 2019, scholar Laura Pulido articulated the importance of understanding a “cultural memory of erasure” as an element of organizing history.<sup>15</sup> Reclaiming cultural memory provides strength, sustenance, and vision. It also produces an archive of injustice that can help orient and ground requirements that would make structural belonging real. In the Bay Area, Sogorea Te’ Land Trust is an organization led by urban Indigenous women. While reclaiming and returning Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone land to Indigenous stewardship, it also acts to powerfully underscore the reality of contemporary Ohlone presence and combats the erasure of Ohlone history as the first inhabitants of that land. Artists frequently act as alternative historians in compelling and transformative ways that create spaces for learning about these histories, such as Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration and National Memorial for Peace and Justice (focused on racial terror lynchings) or Dread Scott’s 2019 reenactment of the largest slave revolt in US history through a multi-year community-based process.

## MALCOLM X JAZZ FESTIVAL

EastSide Arts Alliance is a cultural center rooted in the San Antonio neighborhood of Oakland that hosts hundreds of events each year, classes, as well as other cultural, political and arts programming. For the past 20 years, the center has hosted the Malcolm X Jazz Festival in nearby San Antonio park. The festival celebrates diverse elements of Black cultural production and their relationship to liberation struggles over time. The work expands popular understanding of the contributions and legacy of Malcolm X as well, who saw culture as, “an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle,” and that “we must recapture our heritage and identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves and break the bonds of White supremacy.” The festival reframes and grounds the cultural heritage, identity and legacy of jazz, blues, and hip-hop and cultural production more broadly as an essential element of Black liberation, while creating a yearly, positive gathering space for the San Antonio Neighborhood and Oakland more broadly.

Photo by Stevie Sanchez, EastSide Arts Alliance





Gathering, Mount Mackay, Fort William First Nations, Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1992 Photo: Michael Beynon. Image Courtesy of the Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity

## Articulating and validating alternative and marginalized value systems and ways of knowing

# 3

Against Euro-American attempts of Native genocide and slavery and plantation system, Native people and enslaved Africans used ritual, culture, and art to reaffirm systems of value that articulated belonging—to the earth, to history, to each other, and to collective futures. Cultural theorist and writer Sylvia Wynter frames how rituals and dance served as ways to reestablish human connection to earth against the extractive plantation system.<sup>16</sup> Across numerous colonial contexts—Maori healing practices in New Zealand, Candomblé in Brazil, and the Sun Dance across North America—ritual practices were banned, reflecting the power that they had to disrupt and reject colonial narratives and practices aimed at their dehumanization. Practices like these continue to emerge and produce radically different visions of value and belonging despite the presence of violent, dominant value systems.

### AYUMEE-AAWACH OOMAMA-MOWAN/ SPEAKING TO THE THEIR MOTHER Rebecca Belmore

Anishnibekwe artist Rebecca Belmore's sculptural work—a larger-than-life megaphone—creates the opportunity for witnessing and participating in alternative forms of communication and knowledge through inviting First Nations people to speak with the earth. Installed at different locations, the megaphone reorients forms of communication and the framing on who/what is able to communicate. Represented in this work, the curator and writer Jen Budney pinpoints the importance of speaking and listening to country/land/earth in Indigenous communities and how this is reflected in ritual and artistic practice.<sup>17</sup> The work shifts human relationship to the land as one of dialogue rather than ownership through use of ritual and symbol.

# 4

## Shifting and democratizing concepts of expertise

In 1982, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released *The Message*, one of the first rap hits. Though not with the language of public health researchers, in the song Flash speaks about the relationship of toxic stress to the social determinants of health. He raps, “The bill collectors, they ring my phone / And scare my wife when I’m not home / Got a bum education, double-digit inflation / Can’t take the train to the job, there’s a strike at the station / Neon King Kong standin’ on my back / Can’t stop to turn around, broke my sacroiliac / A mid-range migraine, cancered membrane...” It would take at least two decades for public health to begin seriously discussing these same ideas. While Flash may not have been invited to perform for the World Health Organization or publish his work in journals, his analysis and expertise was made public through music.

Building on the radical pedagogy of educator Paolo Freire, theater artist Augusto Boal developed theater exercises and forms that sought a dialogic relationship between performers and audience, and used theater as a way to develop understanding of and action upon the world.<sup>18</sup> Cultural strategy frequently subverts the traditional pathways to expertise, too often held through infrastructures and institutions built on systems of oppression. Art provides forums and mediums that can circumvent traditional rubrics of expertise, and entry points for more people to express their truths as valid contributions to our understanding of the world.

## GHANA THINK TANK

The premise of Ghana Think Tank is simple: ask experts in the third world to solve problems in the first world. The infrastructure of the project flips historical and paternalistic development models on their head, reframing concepts of expertise and the need to take leadership from the global margins. In the project pictured below, GTT surveyed residents of Williamstown, Massachusetts about their concerns with global warming, and then shared those concerns with think tanks that GTT convened in countries already deeply impacted with the effects of global warming. These experts conducted a series of discussions and planning sessions to devise responses and recommendations. Many of the answers reflected the need for people in Massachusetts to lessen their global footprint as a way to create a sustainable planet. The photo here is based on advice from Moroccan experts who advised Williamstown residents to begin to search out new, sustainable food sources as cultivation of protein sources like beef get harder. In developing this practice, crickets were served at the gallery opening.

Climate Curious. Photo by Ghana Think Tank, 2017.





## Trespassing across sectors and silos

# 5

Building on reflections made by the artist Rick Lowe about the potential for artists to be trespassers across many domains, scholar Shannon Jackson reminds that, “It is of course in that trespassing that art makes different zones of the social available for critical reflection.”<sup>19</sup> Sectors, disciplines, issues, and other silos prevent us from accessing the holistic imperative that is central to belonging. Structures that reward a narrow version of success in academia, the nonprofit world, and much professional practice reinforce these silos. For artists and cultural workers, who have less entrenched structures of success (and rubrics of measurement), they have a unique ability to move between and across these divides. In their movement, artists and culturemakers create profound connections and potentialities. This trespassing requires attention to symbolic overlaps and a willingness to challenge normative approaches.

### WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK NY COMMITTEE

Though not an art project, the organizers of Wages for Housework (particularly the NY Committee) employed cultural strategies to advance their critique of the devaluation of women’s labor and the intersection of patriarchy and white supremacy. Through these processes they sought to revalue housework by bringing it into different frames of analysis. These techniques included the widely distributed zine *Tap Dance*, renting a Brooklyn storefront for public conversations and women drop-ins, selling Wages for Housework-themed potholders (pictured), and frequenting supermarkets and laundromats as the “shop floors” for home workers.

# 6

## Bridging across divides and differences

In a Haas Institute paper she wrote on the role of mind science in narrative change, the Perception Institute's Rachel Godsil notes that, "Our brain serves a social purpose, connecting us as creatures in a larger community through interwoven stories... Stories form the basis for empathy and for figuring out acceptable or unacceptable social behavior."<sup>20</sup> When art tells stories, it can bridge what may appear to be insurmountable interpersonal divides. Stories can transcend physical and material boundaries, including national borders, the walls of prisons or neighborhood dividing lines. Art can often create an infrastructure for the exchange of stories and experiences that would otherwise be impossible. For example, in *La Piel de la Memoria*, artists Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá created a mobile museum on a bus that consisted of objects loaded with personal memories. The objects were collected from individuals living in different areas of a neighborhood that had experienced ongoing violence between them. The bus then traveled between the areas as a way to reflect the shared impact and stories of these communities. Stories like these strengthen connections within and across communities that are essential for building power, for healing, and for including stories of lives too often rendered invisible.



### MARIPOSA & THE SAINT Julia Steele Allen

The play *Mariposa & the Saint* is an intimate look at solitary confinement. The play was developed by two friends who met through California Coalition for Women Prisoners as a way to help one of them through her time in solitary confinement. When the play was finished, the co-writers decided to use the play to support solitary confinement reform and abolition movements across the country. After each showing of the play, event organizers worked with local people in the place the play was performed to enter a dialogue, with the post-show conversation having equal time as the play. In many places, audiences were largely sympathetic, which strengthened local organizing bases, but didn't bridge the conversation to people who weren't already in favor of, or mobilized against solitary confinement.

As the tour continued, the organizers began to seek out relationships with audiences who were also family members or friends of their sympathetic audiences—legislators, judges, and students studying to become jail guards. These connections supported a second tour for audiences who weren't immediately sympathetic to the work. The emotional power of the work allowed it to bridge the otherwise reactive political stance of many of its audiences and support the campaigns to reform/repeal solitary in places that otherwise were closed off to the issue.

Post-show dialogue with members of WISDOM and the Prison Ministry Project in Madison, Wisconsin, April 2016. Courtesy of Julia Steele Allen.



## Convening and connecting coalitions, movements, communities

# 7

Culture can provide wide and inclusive entry points. It can also provide an opportunity for gathering and can retain people in a process or project when other means might not. Even when people may not agree politically or ideologically, art can provide opportunities to work towards shared goals and understanding. For example, the People's Kitchen Collective uses food as a medium to literally set tables for dialogue, convening, celebration, and organizing. For 20 years, the Allied Media Conference has used an expansive definition of media, and not a focus on issues, as the central organizing medium of the conference. This entry point has led to the launching of numerous national networks of ongoing political influence. In an interview, Civil Rights activist Dorothy Cotton described the movement as a, "singing movement" and shared a story about a young man dropping his work and jumping a fence to join a march (and the movement for the rest of his life) because he was so drawn by the music.<sup>21</sup> Artistic and cultural projects can also be explicitly political, serving to provide unifying symbols and language, as with the visual work of Emory Douglas for the Black Panthers. Across many more contexts, art can function as connective tissue and a welcoming entry point.

### REFORM

#### Pepón Osorio and the Bobcat Collective

In 2013, Philadelphia closed 24 schools, including Fairhill Elementary in North Philadelphia. Osorio, an artist and professor at nearby Temple University wondered how the closure had affected the surrounding community (schools like Fairhill were planned at the center of neighborhoods) and slowly initiated a process of reconvening those connected to Fairhill. Over nearly three years, Osorio worked with a collective of teenage alumni and his Temple students to organize a series of public events including a Fairhill Fun Day (modeled on a school tradition) which reconvened 800 former students and employees for the first time since 2013 (pictured here), and a class reunion. The collective also spoke at public meetings and interviewed decision-makers and stakeholders about the closures. The project culminated in an installation that repurposed many of the materials left in the school and spurred on the efforts of the collective as they connect with related efforts around school closures in Puerto Rico.

reForm Fun Day at Fairhill, May 1st, 2015.  
Photo by Tony Rocco.

# 8

## Activating and provoking emotion

Perhaps the most commonly-held understanding of art's impact and power is that it can spark emotions that range from joy to fear, sadness to rage, reverence to nourishment. This might be experienced intimately when reading a wrenching poem alone or, as was the practice of Martin Luther King, Jr. to call Mahalia Jackson on the phone to listen to her sing in times of his own despair. It might occur in public forms such as the 2014 People's Climate March which included massive artistic production and coordination or in the joyful and inspired response to Ryan Coogler's film *Black Panther*. The emotive and affective power of art is one of its most tenacious and compelling attributes, if not also one that is most subjectively experienced. For many, it's not hard to imagine a poem, song, movie, painting, poster, or performance that has transformed how we see the world and turn to for energy, inspiration, a good cry or laugh.



### **GET ON BOARD LITTLE CHILDREN, THERE'S ROOM FOR MANY A MORE** Campo Santo

A twenty-minute performance by the Bay Area theatre collective Campo Santo reading the text of the Kerner Commission and two other documents; W.E.B Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* and the policy platform from the Movement for Black Lives. The power and skill of the performers created a strong emotional connection to the three documents and provoked a standing ovation. The performance of the texts, the layering of the language and addition of elements of song and repetition revealed the ways that the artistic tools transported the written pieces that are primarily viewed through analytic lenses into an emotional, heart-space.

Kerner Commission at 50 Conference, organized by the Haas Institute, 2018. Performed by Campo Santo members Delina Patrice Brooks, Britney (Brit) Frazier, Ashley Smiley, Dezi Solèy. Text organized by Evan Bissell and Sean San José (Campo Santo). Photo by Serghino Roosblad.

# 9

## Disrupting the dominant worldview through interventions of worldviews from the margins

Disruptions of a dominant white supremacist worldview are an everyday occurrence. The impossibility of existing as an “Other” under a worldview that seeks to erase the “Other” makes these disruptions unavoidable and inevitable. In the context of poverty, anti-Black racism, and transphobia, these disruptions are met with especially dangerous and violent responses on the part of, or protected by, the state—responses that have catalyzed the Movement for Black Lives.

Recognizing the power of the margin for its radically different viewpoint and insisting on the value of oneself and worldview, artists and cultural producers have long held a role as critical interventionists. These critiques can be subversive, such as Goya revealing the degeneracy of the aristocracy in his royal portraits or Basquiat’s crowns on energetic and deconstructed figures. These interruptions can also be implicit in form, like Zora Neale Hurston rebuffing attempts to “clean up” her dialect-based writing or Gloria Anzaldúa’s bilingual, genre bending text *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Disruptions of worldview can also be direct, as with Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds’ public remembrance of Native murder in Minneapolis or Code Pink’s citizen arrest of Henry Kissinger for war crimes. And they may also take the form of radical presence; as with Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s mytho-hybrid identity constructions or Greta Thunberg’s weekly climate strike protest outside the Swedish Parliament building. Importantly, these interventions don’t just disrupt, but simultaneously express and demonstrate radically different worldviews.

### POSTERS OF ACT UP Gran Fury

In the midst of the AIDS crisis and government inaction, Gran Fury formed out of the direction action group ACT UP as an 11-person collective. It created a series of public works that directly raised the issue of homophobia, misogyny, and racism in the discussion of AIDS relief, while also celebrating different expressions of sexuality in direct ways. Its works challenged myths and narratives about the relationship between sexuality and AIDS, while also serving to raise the profile of LGBTQ issues and presence. Alongside the bus ads (pictured on this page), the group created the iconic pink triangle symbol (as an inversion of the Nazi symbol for queer people), and numerous posters that offered scathing, witty, and emotional critiques of public officials, companies, and religious leaders who were blocking relief to people impacted by AIDS.



Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn't Kill, Greed and Indifference Do* (Muni Bus installation), ink on vinyl, 1990



## Building the space and means to imagine, play and envision alternatives

# 10

Equal to the ability of art to offer critical insight into dominant narratives and systems, is its ability to envision alternatives. Rachel Godsil writes that, “He who defines reality holds power.”<sup>22</sup> For people excluded from social power, art and culture are forms of power that allows one to redefine the radical possibilities of reality. Activists and designers Kenneth Bailey and Lori Lobenstine frame culture as a “policy of the irrational” that allows us to move beyond the rational and agreed upon to create deep and transformational change.<sup>23</sup> Building on this, the writer adrienne maree brown reminds that, “all organizing is science fiction,” because organizers are engaged in the effort to create a world we haven’t yet experienced.<sup>24</sup> A key radical potential of art lies in its capacity to untie itself from the pragmatic confines of political debate and act outside traditional forms of social power. Not only about re-envisioning, art can also reinforce and reflect worldviews. Parables, folk-tales, and other stories have long been principal means for expressing worldviews and meta-narratives.

### **BORRANDO LA FRONTERA (ERASING THE BORDER)** Ana Teresa Fernández

Born in Tijuana and living and working in the United States, the artist traveled to the Mexican side of the border to complete a performance piece that imagined a gap in the border wall. Fernández painted the columns of the border wall to match the sky so that it looked like a section of the border had suddenly been removed. In this way, the piece moved beyond the slogans of “no borders” to allow us to see no fence, and momentarily, inhabit a world rooted in belonging that transcends national borders.

Borrando la Frontera (Erasing the Border), Ana Teresa Fernández. Performance at Tijuana/San Diego Border, 2011. Photographed by the artist's mother Maria Teresa Fernández, courtesy of artist and Gallery Wendi Norris

# 11

## Making complex concepts more accessible

In many ways this is the most immediate potential of arts and culture, illustrated in the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. While art can effectively illustrate existing ideas, and not only through visuals, it can also support a process of inquiry that makes complex systems and concepts more accessible and takes the work of research, policy development, organizing, beyond more narrow or singular conceptions of expertise. In social change organizations, communications staff are often tasked with taking up the bulk of the work to translate research-driven, academic, or insular language in forms and ways that will reach and move a wider variety of audiences. This work takes place through forms such as editing, design, multimedia, and storytelling. By collaborating more intentionally with artists and culturemakers and educators who understand critical pedagogy, this work can be especially critical to creating deep, authentic ways of communicating that avoids and resists techniques that are superficial or too closely derived from a corporate, profit-driven model of defining identity.

### WHO IS DEPENDENT ON WELFARE? Ananya Roy and Abby VanMuijen

In a video viewed nearly one million times, Professor Ananya Roy narrates an illustrated video that challenges assumptions about welfare, while illuminating the ways that government systems support wealth accumulation and wealth protection for the rich. The video uses playful illustrations to make otherwise abstract concepts concrete and meaningful. The novel form also pushed Roy to think of her writing and communication in a new way, as the backbone script for a visual story. By using an accessible infrastructure (YouTube) and an accessible form (an illustrated video) the video has greatly broadened the reach of her work on this issue, as much of academic research requires university affiliation or paid membership to access.



Video design and illustrations by: Abby VanMuijen ([www.roguemarkstudios.com](http://www.roguemarkstudios.com)). Text written and narrated by Ananya Roy, 2013.

# 12

## Expanding the reach

Art and cultural strategy allows our work to be in cultural spaces that people trust, refer to, and draw inspiration from. Art can happen in popular culture, it can be public, it can exist in and speak to different cultures, and it can appeal to different literacies, languages and learning modalities. At the Haas Institute, our work targets a variety of decision-makers as well as movements and impacted communities. Arts and culture can strengthen efforts to connect with under-reached people, hard-to-reach people, and those not politically or socially engaged. We've built on the work of those in popular culture to explore intersections and overlaps with themes and topics of the Institute. This includes leveraging the power of popular media narratives by hosting Tarrell Alvin McCraney (writer of *Moonlight*) as a keynote speaker at the Othering & Belonging Conference for example, and hosting free film screenings and dialogues around *Black Panther* and the 20-year anniversary of *Gattaca*. These efforts expand reach and create opportunities for narrative shift. This broadening of audience should be viewed through a targeted universalism approach—reaching which audience will bring benefit to everyone or be most widely accessible?

Reaching targeted populations requires new ways of communicating as well as the infrastructure for promoting the work. Rashad Robinson of Color of Change describes the need for an expanded infrastructure to advance progressive change efforts, “through social and personal spaces that aren't explicitly political or focused on issues, but are nonetheless the experiences and venues through which people shape their most heart-held values.”<sup>25</sup>

## INFLUENCING, SHAPING, AND USING POPULAR CULTURE

The most obvious form of expanding reach is through popular culture—TV, movies, music, sports, gaming and more. In recent years, popular culture has engaged and represented a wide range of issues that expands and complicates the cultural mainstream. Oscar winners *Moonlight* and *Coco*, and chart-toppers Lizzo (with her body-positive lyrics) and Lil Nas X (with both his country hit and coming out as gay) are only a sampling of new producers, themes, and cultural representations that are taking mainstage. These works, among others, tell stories that disrupt a single dominant narrative and cement a plurality of narratives in the mainstream. These representations and works also offer opportunities for new discussions and with new audiences, as evidenced by the number of discussion groups and articles that have engaged the contradictions and possibilities of *Black Panther* or Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. Ongoing engagement around this work, and stronger relationships with cultural producers and cultural workers, such as the work of Harness an organization that supports action and engagement by celebrities with organizers, is essential for narrative saturation and the shape of those narratives and cultural forms in popular culture.

Photo by Emmanuel Mbala, The crowd at a Melbourne screening of *Black Panther*, doing the Wakanda greeting. 2018



# Four Essential Practices

There are numerous ways to activate cultural strategy. In the emergent work of a cultural strategy for belonging at the Haas Institute, we've identified four essential practices. These practices align process and outcome by balancing questions of leadership, knowledge and cultural production, and power, with questions of cultural strategy's relationship to other change strategies.

## 1

### Cultivate vibrant and diverse forms of cultural practice that support the growth of leadership and practice of those directly and deeply impacted by systems of oppression

This means building the power of people involved in the work by expanding notions of expertise and developing capacity and skills for long-term engagement and leadership. It also means highlighting and amplifying existing leaders who work primarily in the space of culture. This practice is deeply informed by critical participatory action research and Freirean pedagogy with a focus on art and culture as methods of research and analysis.<sup>26</sup>

Kerner@50 Student Art Collaborative, Nikko Duren, Kiana Parker, Dulce María López, and el lee Silver. Not pictured Ashley Holloway and Lulu Matute.



#### EXAMPLE

In 2018, the Haas Institute hosted a conference on the 50th anniversary of the Kerner Commission, a special presidential commission investigating the causes of racial uprisings across the nation in 1967. For this occasion, we commissioned original pieces from practicing professional artists in visual arts, poetry and performance whose work engaged the core themes; Damon Davis, Chinaka Hodge, Campo Santo, and Sadie Barnette. The conference also created the opportunity to facilitate a five-week intensive process with six undergraduate students to engage with the themes of the conference through the creation of collaborative artistic and cultural work. Through research and design processes they engaged the history in deep and personal ways. Their resulting creative works, which took the form of sculptural installation, mixed-media visuals, film, and a public presentation, expanded the conference learnings through additional forms of analysis and interpretation that brought in the power of symbols and broader understandings of gender, immigration, and more.

# 2

## **Amplify the knowledge, insight and vision that comes through culture and cultural production and create containers and experiences where this knowledge, insight and vision can be expressed and understood on its own terms**

Cultural forms and practices hold insights and knowledge in the form that they were created, and they can have highly specific audiences. When we are not the creators or even the intended audience, we can work to develop understanding in that original form, not as a translation. Illuminating practices, narratives, stories, frames, and symbols in their original form can provide important insight in developing systems and practices that are more reflective of the needs and experiences of a complex society and strategies for change. These multiple ways of knowing and expressing hold the transformative potential of a cultural strategy of belonging as an epistemological shift. At times, this means respecting and trusting the opacity of cultural practice and knowledge (trust is not, of course, uncritical acceptance). Anti-colonial philosopher Édouard Glissant defined this “as a right to not have to be understood on others’ terms, a right to be misunderstood if need be.”<sup>27</sup> The act of uncritical translation or extraction of a functionalist knowledge can flatten, destroy, or misrepresent.



### **EXAMPLE**

The Nile Project, co-founded by Mina Girgis, who is now a Senior Fellow at the Haas Institute, uses a process of cross-cultural, international musical collaboration to address water distribution and resources in the region. The music invites cultural and environmental curiosity within the region, providing a metaphor for and practice of government and economic collaboration around the river. The project uses the unique process of musical collaboration developed by Girgis (master classes, musical “dating”, small group collaborations, arrangements and rehearsals) as the template for exchange and dialogue between scholars, students, and government workers across national boundaries. This process creates a radically different environment for discussion and a container for relating across difference—musically, politically, nationally and professionally.

Nile Project, Aswan Gathering, 2013. Photo by Reto Albertalli



# 3

## Align with efforts for material, political, and social change

This means strengthening research, policy, and organizing projects through the knowledge, insights, and practices that arise within cultural strategy and creating opportunities for deep integration. It also means strengthening cultural strategy projects through the tools, knowledge and insights of other change strategies.

### EXAMPLE

The Haas Institute’s Staying Power Fellowship convened a group of Richmond residents who were members of local community organizations to develop public art projects and narratives that addressed the housing crisis. In the eight-month process, they derived analysis from the intersection of personal experience and structural forces. The fellows designed research processes that shaped arts-based outcomes and cultivated their skills and leadership capacity through the process. The resulting artistic outcomes were developed by the fellows but also closely tied to and informed by the change efforts of the organizations and policy research around housing needs in Richmond carried out by the Haas Institute. Fellow Sasha Graham envisioned and co-led a process to develop a “know-your-rights” mural that celebrated the history of community organizing for the passage of two tenant protection laws and clarified key aspects of the laws. The production of the mural triggered an inquiry into the city’s implementation of one of the laws by local organizers and lawyers, which led to a year-long process of rewriting the policy and creating the structures for implementation, which had otherwise been dormant.

Staying Power Mural, Richmond, California. Co-led by Sasha Graham and Evan Bissell, 2017. Photo by Evan Bissell.

# 4

## Make social and cultural change into a new “common sense.”

This means that cultural strategy efforts must also simultaneously engage strategic communications and narrative change work. Together, these efforts move through multiple spheres of life—the everyday, the political, the economic, and the cultural. It also means building the infrastructure for sharing and amplifying the work at scales and duration that begin to shift worldviews.

The “Making Belonging: Culturemaker Panel” at the 2019 Othering & Belonging Conference. The panel featured a conversation among four cultural leaders coming from different sectors, from left to right: author Jeff Chang, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, actor Dawn-Lyen Gardner, and NFL player, philanthropist, and author Michael Bennett. Photo by Eric Arnold.

### EXAMPLE

Since their inception, the Othering & Belonging Conferences have included an array of people working in cultural fields—playwrights, athletes, actors, dancers, and essayists to give compelling and evocative presentations on their work, alongside scholars, advocates, lawyers, funders and more. In 2019 the conference included the development of learning tools that employ arts-based teaching methods. This curation and approach allows for the trespassing of culture into a space where the audience is predominantly from the non-profit, government, academic, and philanthropic sectors. In this way, through major platforms, we present multiple, simultaneous ways of re-coding symbols and reframing narratives of belonging. This strategic communications and cultural strategy approach recognizes how an intentional integration of arts and culture elevates an interconnected, dual movement of social and cultural change and speaks to the power of stories and narratives that are crucial to influencing both. It seeks to connect personal, emotional, and professional understandings in ways that reveal continuity in this “common sense.”



## WHY

# A cultural strategy for belonging provides a unique opportunity for effecting change

It has been said numerous times that culture is an essential site of change and power. This is due to the characteristics of culture that make it a unique location of social life. The Culture Group puts it this way; “Politics is where some of the people are some of the time. Culture is where most of the people are most of the time.”<sup>28</sup> Culture is pervasive and everyday. It permeates multiple spheres of life, even the political, where styles of speech, dress, orientation to conflict, and theories of change create the conditions of political engagement. Culture shapes worldviews and values. Culture can erase and silence, and it can be a source of healing and strengthening.<sup>29</sup> Naming cultural aspects and elements that have shaped my own life helps me better understand my own perspective and viewpoint. This includes those that have perpetuated othering—unearthing the way that conceptions of individualism and success are shaped by my socio-economic position growing up in a white, middle class family. And it includes those that have expanded belonging—the emergence of new values, symbols and stories that reshape my worldview through organizing, house music, and science-fiction (to name a few).

In the following section I explore why a cultural strategy for belonging is effective and holds potential by looking at three characteristics of culture that can help guide and locate the work.



Still from the Get Out the Vote video *We Are California*, a collaboration between the Haas Institute and California Calls. Video by Dominique DeLeon, 2018.

## Cultures of “othering” are dynamic and contestable

Culture is constantly made and remade through the expression of symbolic forms and the negotiation of their meaning between multiple parties. The maintenance of dominant forms of culture require upkeep—often in violent, erasing and manipulative ways. This contestation happens through multiple elements that make up culture and provide insight into locations of cultural strategy engagement. Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz outlines culture as:

*“A system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”<sup>30</sup>*

Each of these elements are reciprocal and cyclical in their formation. **Inherited conceptions** are expressed through and embedded in **symbolic forms**; our interaction with and interpretation of symbolic forms **communicate, perpetuate, and develop knowledge** about and toward life; elements of this knowledge are disrupted or normalized and come to function as **worldview**. In further

detail, these elements are:

*Inherited conceptions.* These are worldviews that come from the contexts of society, culture, community, religion, family and personal experience, and are shaped by socio-economic positionality.

*Symbolic forms.* Symbolic forms uphold and transfer the embedded information of inherited conceptions. These can take many forms, and also be material in their impact or structure. For example, money is a symbolic form of relationship that takes on different meanings based on positionality—do you see money as debt, power, obligation, love? These can take more direct forms as well. A mascot is a symbol that creates history and pride, but the meaning of it is shaped by the positionality and inherited conceptions of the interpreter—the name of the Washington professional football team, for example.

**Means by which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge.** At its base, this includes the many forms of language used daily—body, verbal, written or visual. These forms of language construct the stories and symbols that make sense of experience and become the basis of knowledge. Stories and symbols are made collective through infrastructures in multiple spheres of life—from personal to educational spaces to popular media to government

policies and practices. The knowledges communicated, perpetuated, and developed through these means are frequently in conflict with each other—for example how a child might learn about a union if their family is in one, compared to how they might learn from news coverage of a politician who is anti-union.

**Knowledge about and attitudes toward life.** The development of one's knowledge is a continual process. As this knowledge comes to shape one's attitudes towards life, it influences and reshapes worldview and inherited conceptions.

Each of these elements are locations of cultural strategy. Voting in the United States provides an illustrative example. In addition to being a civic activity that has real consequences on the political system and socioeconomic structure, voting can be seen as a symbolic form of belonging or exclusion. Historically in the United States, this symbolic line has followed laws and practices that shape participation based on gender, race, class, status, relationship to the carceral system, and language. Research shows that a voter's inactivity is rooted in how they view themselves in the world and their ability to have impact through voting or other forms of civic engagement.<sup>31</sup> In other words, a person's worldview shapes their interpretation of voting as an act in which they will participate or not. This is further communicated through a variety of means that either reinforce or disrupt that worldview—non-responsive politicians, voter ID laws, poll taxes, voting restrictions on formerly and currently incarcerated people, youth, and immigrants on the one hand, and projects like the Cultural Ambassadors program and Blueprint for Belonging on the other.

A cultural strategy for belonging works in alignment with the long struggle over expanding who controls voting, to also contest who controls the *meaning* of voting. This contestation of meaning happens in the production (what is the worldview being reinforced in the dominant narrative around voting?) and the interpretation (what is the worldview of the person interpreting the narrative around voting?).<sup>32</sup> In decoding the meaning of symbolic forms, the interpreter's worldview creates an understanding that is either consistent with that of the producers, inconsistent, or some hybrid variation of this. In religion, this has produced syncretic meanings, such as the embedding of indigenous stories, figures, and deities in the Catholic forms imposed by European missionaries in Central and South America.

In his analysis of resistance and subordination in Southeast Asia, James. C. Scott also identified hidden transcripts, or meaning and communication that is hidden from people in different power groups. This allows people to perform an understanding in line with a dominant meaning through a public transcript, while also holding a different "hidden" interpretation as a key element of resistance.<sup>33</sup> In relationship to voting, one way this might manifest is a worldview that is critical or distrustful of the political system, but also sees participation as a necessary act.

An interpretation that is inconsistent with the one the dominant producer intended, or the production of symbols and stories that hold different meaning, can contribute to reshaping worldviews. Nurturing these meanings creates opportunities for reworking the dominant narratives around voting. This can expand who sees themselves as a voter in order to build power around a strategic narrative of belonging and the policies that reflect economic and social belonging. In other words, although homeowners disproportionately vote at higher rates than renters, shifting inherited conceptions around voting can increase how many renters vote, and subsequently how tenant protection initiatives do at the polls or in the legislature.

Shifts in worldview are not enough alone, because these shifts will not be sticky unless also reflected in economic, political, and social changes. Contemporary organizing to lower the voting age, allow formerly and currently incarcerated people to vote, or keep polling places open and prevent people being scrubbed from voter rolls, are contemporaneous with ongoing efforts to shift who sees themselves as a voter. The double movement of systemic and cultural change are intertwined, reciprocal, and essential.

## **Cultures of belonging already exist in historical, collective and everyday forms**

From below and from the margins, cultural expressions and forms, and the meanings and values they hold, can guide a cultural strategy for belonging. A cultural strategy for belonging builds upon alternative and liberatory forms of culture that people have developed before and within the dominant cultures of capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonial-

ism, and other forms of oppression. These cultural practices and knowledge form through people loving and thriving, resisting and negotiating, acting spontaneously and keeping continuity, engaging ritual, tending memory, and experiencing grief and joy. As the Culture Group shared, culture is where most people are most of the time. But more importantly, these cultural forms are *how* people navigate oppression and *what* sustains people. Clyde Woods elaborates on the context of the emergence of the blues, and the power it held as a collective and everyday form:

*“The blues emerge immediately after the overthrow of Reconstruction. During this period, unmediated African American voices were routinely silenced through the imposition of a new regime of censorship based on exile, assassination and massacre. The blues became an alternative form of communication, analysis, moral intervention, observation, celebration for a new generation that had witnessed slavery, freedom, and unfreedom in rapid succession between 1860 and 1875.”*<sup>34</sup>

Arts manager and policymaker Roberto Bedoya offers another example in *rasquachismo*, a practice of Chicano and Mexican art movements that is combinatory, quick, reuses materials, and is often crude and direct. For Bedoya, the *rasquachismo* aesthetic of his Bay Area childhood barrio signaled a politics of belonging that disrupted a white spatial imaginary. He writes that the unique cultural spatial imaginary of Rasquache is in the “culture of lowriders who embrace the street in a tempo parade of coolness; it’s the roaming dog that marks its territory; it’s the defiance signified by a bright, bright, bright house; it’s the fountain of the peeing boy in the front yard; it’s the DIY car mechanic, leather upholsterer or wedding-dress maker working out of his or her garage with the door open to the street; it’s the porch where the elders watch; and it’s the respected neighborhood watch program.”<sup>35</sup>

The development of strategy in line with cultural forms like these can create social change processes that are reflective of people’s lives and experiences and widely accessible because of their everyday, collective, and historical character. They are also effective, having already worked “in situations of scarce resources and intersecting systems of oppression,” and so they, “tend to be the most holistic and sustainable.”<sup>36</sup> The turn to strategy can take shape in many ways; the trespassing of poetry into

a city council presentation for the Staying Power Fellowship, a healing space with multiple alternative modalities at the Othering & Belonging Conference, and the placement of a theater talk-back in an Oakland barbershop. Each build on, adjust or amplify existing forms of cultures of belonging.

Beginning to inventory and name the infinite traces and influences that we build on in our work is essential for valuing this history, creating continuity, and not losing that which has come before. It also helps to push away from the idea of individual cultural producers or geniuses acting on their own. Instead, we can recognize the specific lineages and histories (and often invisible labor) that goes into the collective and everyday forms of culture that provide essential wisdom for creating belonging.



Leading up to the 2018 *Barbershop Chronicles* performance at UC Berkeley, a community forum was held at Benny Adem Grooming Parlor, presented by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, Benny Adem Grooming Parlor, Africanity Love, Priority Africa Network, and the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. Photo by Tim Shonnard.

## Cultural forms and expressions can advance belonging despite asymmetries of power

Cultural moments, knowledge, expressions, practices and forms can catalyze change when other avenues of change are stagnated, closed off, unimaginable or heavily policed. This happens even in the case of social, economic, and political imbalances and repression, and ultimately can contribute to the ending of those imbalances. From punk to muralismo, slang to voguing, cultural forms create their own spaces of belonging and expressions of belongingness that seep across boundaries that are seeking to maintain exclusion and dehumanization. At times these “crossings”

Shifts in worldview are not enough alone, because these shifts will not be sticky unless also reflected in economic, political, and social changes.



The Hōkūleʻa double-hulled voyaging canoe, which since its first launch in 1975, has sailed over 140,000 nautical miles. Courtesy Polynesian Voyaging Society. Photo by 'Ōiwi TV. 2015.

are co-opted and sanitized for dominant cultural audiences in pursuit of profits and the erasure of the people and contexts of their origination. But at other times (and also when co-opted) these cultural forms and expressions can build social, economic, and political power.

In part, this ability to move across seemingly impenetrable borders is possible because culturemaking cannot always be shaped or guarded by gatekeepers that reinforce the status quo. The irrepressibility of cultural expression is too organic and spontaneous, and frequently built on DIY or minimal infrastructure.<sup>37</sup> In academia, media, law, politics, economics, and policy development there has historically been an intensive safeguarding and policing of who can produce knowledge, what knowledge is valued, how it is valued and what is made actionable. These sectors, which largely set and enforce social, political and economic systems, have tightly controlled infrastructure for the reproduction of experts, leaders, and workers and the broadcast of the work.

These gatekeepers undoubtedly exist in cultural spaces as well. At times this gatekeeping is a protective response to the erasure precipitated by cultural appropriation. But there are also those who attempt to shape the “proper” evolution of a musical genre, the visual style of a movement, or the acceptable forms of sexuality in film. Infrastructure is also a site of cultural gatekeeping: the owners of popular and independent media, publishers, grant-makers, radio hosts and their playlists, and curators and museum directors, among others.

Despite this, new forms and expressions of culture inevitably rise, often forged in contexts of extreme inequality and little-to-no infrastructure by people continually engaged in adapting to the challenges, expansions and conditions of everyday life. While difficult to track impact in linear or direct ways, and although not necessarily intended as cultural strategy, these cultural forms and expressions can build social, political, and economic power, while also shifting narratives and worldviews. Consider the global impacts of hip hop in comparison to its early infrastructure (a blank city wall as a canvas, a piece of cardboard as a dancefloor, reworked fragments of songs and daisy-chained speakers) and originators (poor Black, Puerto Rican, and Dominican kids in disinvested neighborhoods of New York). Or, after 600 years of dormancy, consider the way the first wayfinding (celestial navigation) voyage by Nainoa Thompson and crew, on a hand-built, double-hulled sailing canoe between Tahiti and Hawaiʻi, cultivated the renewal of Hawaiian culture, history and identity. Was it imaginable that the 1969 occupation of a defunct federal prison by Indians of All Tribes would catalyze such a revitalization of Native American political and cultural identity, and have such a long trail of impact? Was the mainstream uptake and breaking of political taboos around class and economic inequality assumed when the 99 percent began tent occupations around the country?

With these, and many other examples in mind, a cultural strategy for belonging recognizes that cultural forms and expressions can have sustained and material impact despite and within asymmetries of power.

## CONCLUSION

# Next steps for a cultural strategy for belonging

The following section is broken into three ways to advance a cultural strategy for belonging. The first speaks to those who are in some way practitioners of cultural strategy and their collaborators. The second speaks to those engaged in funding, research and organizational leadership. Finally, the Appendix includes a workshop for those looking to develop and integrate cultural strategy projects in their work. The workshop includes a more robust set of examples than is included in the body of this report.

# Ways cultural strategists can strengthen the field

## 1. Tighten the web of relation between cultural strategy and other change strategies.

Change in cultural spheres can catalyze social, political, and economic change, and cultural change can be catalyzed by change in other areas of life. Cultural change does not inherently precipitate or precede social change, and this becomes especially true if we widen a lens of attribution and influences. For example, Jackie Robinson's baseball career is frequently historicized as a key catalyst of desegregation efforts, which it was. But what if we started the framing of Jackie Robinson's breaking the color line in baseball a half decade earlier? This widened lens would have to include the first March on Washington, which was only proposed but nonetheless demonstrated enough power to pressure Franklin D. Roosevelt to sign an executive order that prohibited ethnic or racial discrimination in hiring in Federal Defense contract work. Would we then need to also expand the frame to include how the March's lead organizer A. Phillip Randolph had worked 15 years prior to found the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black American union? What other contributing factors could we trace, that created the conditions where Robinson's skill, courage, and determination would become a landmark moment of cultural change?

Antonio Gramsci wrote that,

*"The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inven-*

*tory. Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory."<sup>88</sup>*

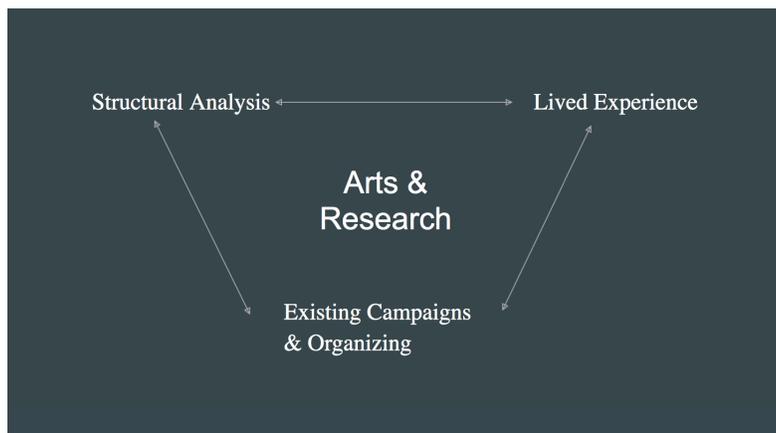
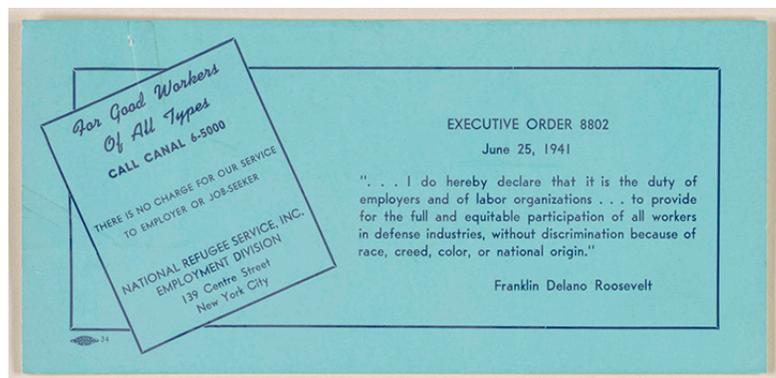
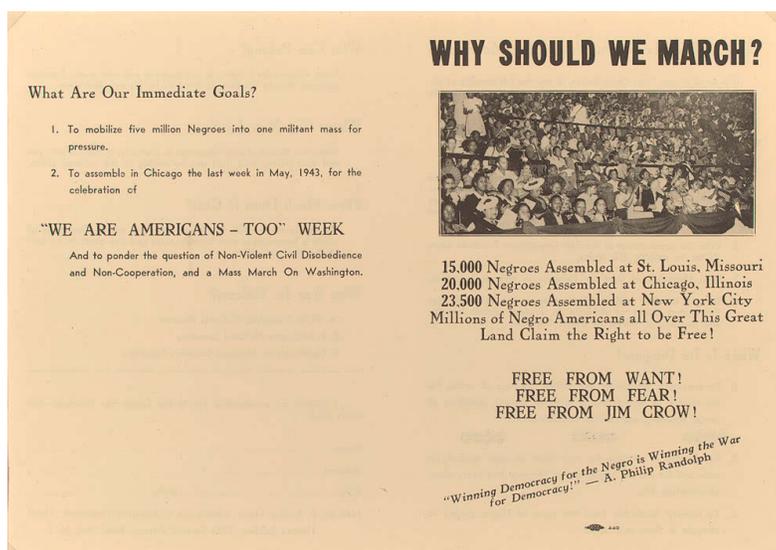
The compiling of this inventory is crucial for shaping how we conceptualize and approach cultural strategy. When we see our work within this inventory of an infinity of traces, it demands that we connect our work to a much broader web of acts. This inventory may be in the present, but it also may include what has come before and what we imagine may come after. Cultural strategy, ideally, serves as a catalyst for cultural change, but it can be strengthened by thinking of it as interactive within this web of legal, organizing, advocacy, research, and political efforts that primarily focus on other levers and spheres of change. This interaction can lead to reciprocal strengthening.



B.E. Parrish, "Straighten Up - And Come Right Down to the March on Washington Movement," 1941, poster, A. Philip Randolph Institute.

If a key practice of cultural strategy is to “amplify the knowledge, insight and vision that comes through culture and cultural production,” as noted earlier in this report, we must reflect on how to make connections to other change strategies in the conceptualization and planning of our work. In the Staying Power Fellowship, this was addressed in the design of the project. The six fellows who created cultural and artistic projects around their experience with the housing crisis in Richmond were drawn from three grassroots organizations engaged in policy and organizing around housing and development. The projects they created were in close dialogue with the goals of ongoing organizing work, but they were created through a collective creative process, not through direction of the organizations or pre-determined forms. In this way the fellowship design structured opportunities for this interaction and reciprocity between multiple sites of change and power building.

Tightening this relationship also means creating more opportunities for culture and cultural production within other change strategies. We can’t—and absolutely shouldn’t imagine we could—design or strategize all forms of cultural production. Not only is this paternalistic, it suffocates the dynamic characteristics of culture which come from people creating and navigating in relationship, collaboration and contestation as a way to survive, enjoy, and make sense of the world. This becomes an instrumental or functionalist<sup>39</sup> use of culture, which denies the value of culture on the terms of those creating it as well as the “poetic knowledge” that it can carry. In developing the play *Mariposa and the Saint*, focused on one woman’s experience of solitary confinement, co-writer Julia Steele Allen reflected on the essential need for the work to be a powerful artistic work in its own right, regardless of the gravity of the content or its relationship to social change efforts. For Steele Allen, it was the emotional connection opened by the play that laid the groundwork for it to become a powerful organizing tool—performed only in states with active campaigns against solitary confinement, and always including an action component and talk-back with organizers and directly impacted people in the second half of the show. This allowed it to enter and move people to action in institutional spaces—a judge’s conference, city council meetings, or a community college where people are preparing for careers as prison guards.<sup>40</sup> It is important to recognize as well that the connections made with organizations around



From top: A. Philip Randolph, “Call to Negro America to March on Washington for Jobs and Equal Participation in National Defense,” *Black Worker* 14 (May 1941); National Refugee Service, Inc., Employment Division. Executive Order 8802. Advertisement, 1941. NAACP Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (051.00.00) Courtesy of the NAACP; Project design for the Staying Power Fellowship, 2017. Evan Bissell and Eli Moore

# A cultural strategy for belonging is not a practice of waiting for and historicizing heroes, but of cultivating vibrant and widespread cultural practice on the terms set out by the people creating it.

the country were made possible by Steele Allen's years of organizing in the anti-prison movement and continued willingness to provide labor and time on the more "mundane" tasks of organizing.

This effort to tighten connections can happen both by practitioners of cultural strategy, as well as by those who may not see cultural strategy as their work. This can mean an invitation (if not simply an openness) to cultural strategy at early stages of projects, research, and organizing in other sectors and disciplines. It means cultivating the infrastructure and resources for the support of artists and cultural producers across a variety of social change activities, not just at the end or as the illustrator of an existing idea (this has its own place as well but ties more closely to the production and output of the work). It also means integrating cultural forms and knowledge into traditionally "non-cultural" forms of research and public events. For those who are working in cultural strategy, ways to strengthen this connection are addressed next.

## 2. Better defining our work and practice

If the different ways of activating cultural strategy are opaque, the asks made of practitioners (strategists, artists, storytellers, culture-makers...) will be subject to preconceived assumptions, and the infrastructure that supports our work will be brittle. At the Haas Institute, we wouldn't ask a researcher to create maps based on complex data sets when the researcher's training and passion is in ethnography. We know not to do this because we have an understanding, or at least some awareness, of different methodologies and methods used in social science research. Cultural strategy can be viewed

similarly. In large part, this paper reflects one effort to contribute to this understanding, but this must also be further defined according to one's own practice and the work being engaged.

To build strong, long-term partnerships it is not enough for artists to say, "Trust me I've got this, let the magic happen." Better defining and articulating the methods, tools, and potential outcomes of our work creates a clearer ground for collaboration (it is also important to know that some potential collaborators may just not be open to deeper and more sustained forms of cultural strategy). The Culture Group outlines a helpful set of notes<sup>41</sup> for artists to keep in mind in approaching collaborations in non-arts spaces, from pay and timeline to the need to articulate one's process. In reflecting on the development of national arts and culture projects like Trans Day of Resilience and Mamas Day, Micah Bazant, Forward Together and Culture Strike also developed a set of Collaboration Principles for Artists and Social Justice Organizers.<sup>42</sup>

Making a cultural strategy process visible and understandable can also help people with a non-cultural strategy practice, develop their own skills, ideas, and methods. The workshop included in this paper is one way that I approach this in supporting people to develop their own ideas and justifications for integrating cultural strategy.

Finally, this clarification can help develop a more sustained infrastructure. When it is clear why we need certain materials for a project or why we might hold in-person meetings at a local restaurant or why a process should be eight months instead of two, this helps clarify resource needs. This also includes being able to articulate why a process might be compromised by taking a shortcut and not having the proper materials or being able to pay collaborators.



Certificate of Belonging: The Stud, nominated by Torrey Cummings & John Cartwright. One of 25 certificates installed in locations of belonging, as part of Artist-in-Residence 2018/19 Christine Wong Yap's project. Photo by Christine Wong Yap.

### 3. Resisting the urge to create individual cultural icons and heroes

The formulations of artistic and cultural practice that are central to a cultural strategy for belonging are extremely elastic, but as outlined previously, they build from historical, collective and everyday practices and forms. In this way, a cultural strategy for belonging is not a practice of waiting for and historicizing heroes, but of cultivating vibrant and widespread cultural practice on the terms set out by the people creating it. This requires respecting the experience, passion, hard work, and skill on the part of individuals who often lead this work—and absolutely the resources to support them—but it doesn't mean relying on icons and heroes. Euro-centric formulations of art center on individualized genius and talent, largely tied to institutions where the museum or market defines the importance of the art. In a cultural strategy for belonging, process is one of the outcomes. In this way projects seek to create opportunities to catalyze the capacity of all people to create and reflect collective and relation-

al processes that practice belonging. This take is more akin to an art which is not split from the functional, spiritual, or from everyday life.<sup>43</sup> This means shifting who is considered an expert or legitimate in creating culture. The Institute's development of fellowship models (heavily informed by participatory action research) and long-term partnerships with community organizations engaged with cultural strategy speaks to the cultivation of many voices and producers.

In 2018, the Institute launched an Artist In Residence program, with dialogue and process as core priorities of the proposals chosen. A core motivation for this is for the Institute to learn from the practices of artists who are skillful in creating processes that create belonging and then are able to reflect and amplify the knowledge and understanding that comes through this. In their very different approaches, this is reflected by the first two awardees, Christine Wong Yap's *100 Stories of Belonging* book and the workshops that led to it, and the art collective Complex Movements, whose deep listening processes connect people across different cities and issues, and then reflect this through multimedia storytelling, music, and immersive performance.

# Ways funders, researchers, and leaders can strengthen the field

## 1. Continuing to expand the push for public funding and infrastructure

The current public infrastructure for arts and culture bears the marks and scars of drastic reductions and continued attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities (a conservative cultural strategy to defund public arts and culture programs in its own right), not to mention defunding for education and increased funding for prisons, policing and the Department of Defense.

To create a truly vibrant and democratic field for cultural strategy, we need to move beyond private support to expand public infrastructure for cultural forms and practices. This requires the support of public sector actors and private philanthropy. Without this public infrastructure Jacob Lawrence may not have grown into a painter; members of the Chicano Arts Movement may not have met in community college art classes; thousands of songs, photos and documents may not have been collected by folklorists and anthropologists like Zora Neal Hurston, Alan Lomax, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle. Shannon Jackson describes how the Works Progress Administration's Federal Theater Project used, "interdependent art forms as vehicles for re-imagining the interdependency of social beings. They gave public form to public life."<sup>44</sup> Countless other examples exist of artists and cultural workers who gained traction through the wide entry-point of public programming and infrastructure. Growing up in the late 80s and 90s in suburban California, I know I experienced dramatically more arts and culture programming in poetry, ceramics, theater,



Members of the Harlem Artists Guild picketing with the Works Progress Administration Artists Union to protest cutbacks to WPA programs. Gwendolyn Bennett (center), Norman Lewis (right), and Frederick Perry (wearing the white hat). Harry Henderson Papers, Penn State University Archives, Pennsylvania State University Libraries, University Park, Pa.

music and visual arts than the students I taught as a once-a-week, shared between two middle-schools, non-profit funded art teacher in the mid-2000s in the same area. When I was 8, receiving art classes wasn't framed as "special." Rather, all students had access to these classes, which reinforced that there was value and importance in art and culture.

In an era of hyper-competitive and overly commodified professionalized art practice, the gate-keeping of cultural production is evermore narrow and

restrictive. Challenging this is an essential aspect of power shift. We need to create more opportunities for experimentation and failure for people who have historically not had the privilege to experiment or fail. If we only support projects through foundations and private grants, we narrow who has the opportunities for practice. Even when grants are targeted for Black people, Indigenous people and people of color, there are other elements of legitimacy and access that define participation—e.g., funding for the Yale painting program graduate rather than the community theater production in Richmond led by a full-time teacher.

This is a key goal: to create a larger playing field of participation at all levels of practice. The Arts Education Policy and Grantmaking Sub-Strategy of the Hewlett Foundation<sup>45</sup> is one example of how an emphasis on a broadened arts education infrastructure can do this. The Green New Deal, with a jobs guarantee provision that focused on the arts could offer a major infusion for jobs creation in this realm. A partial repeal of Prop. 13 in California could bring needed funding for public school arts classes and support of practicing artists as classroom teachers—an expansion which should be coupled with a critical understanding of what cultural narratives are being taught and reinforced through this. What would it mean to secure cultural and arts anchors in their locations, building on models like the Community Arts Stabilization Trust by further leveraging public resources and developing supportive policies? In addition to direct support of projects, the field of philanthropy must consider how to leverage power in support of a longer-term goal of democratizing access to cultural production and the arts through policy, tax structures, and politics.

## 2. Trust and respect the expertise of artists and cultural workers

Artists, storytellers and cultural workers are often seen as some sort of mythic creature who can't be understood. This comes from an unfortunate lineage of the cult of genius where artists are mythologized as “natural” talents who were “born that way.” This is a Eurocentric historicization of artistic practice, often reproduced in the few art classes that people have had. While people are attuned to different sensibilities and have specific technical

skills derived from experience and practice, there is no cookie-cutter artist type or practice. Storytellers, artists, and cultural workers have experience in their skillsets, tools, and languages. This means they have justifications and nuances for why they do their work, which may not be immediately apparent—just as may be the case with any experienced partners, for example, how an administrative assistant processes paperwork or why a researcher frames a question in a specific way. In partnerships it is essential to *respect their experience but engage with their practice*.

Artists and cultural workers must make the case for their work and be clear about their process and approach, but they also need the space and respect to do their work. Otherwise we run the danger of asking people to do work they don't have experience and skills in, or they're left alone to do their work in ways that aren't collaborative, thereby leaving potential ties dormant between cultural strategy and other change strategies.

Finally, trust in a partnership is ultimately about sharing power. This can support a more honest allocation of resources and closer alignment of concepts, goals, and understandings, which, without smothering the unicorn, still creates the conditions for magic to appear.

## 3. Cultural strategy evaluation as an opportunity to rethink evaluation more broadly

The Culture Group's report *Culture Matters*<sup>46</sup> looked at ways to better support and invest in cultural strategy for social change. A key aspect of this report was the question of evaluation, given the challenges presented by the multiple layers of impact of cultural strategy efforts, some which are non-direct, slow to appear, and hard to trace. *Cultural Strategy: A Primer and Introduction* provides important indications towards measuring networks, relationships and looking at the impact of cultural strategy along a continuum.<sup>47</sup> Difficult doesn't mean we shouldn't do it; we do need this clearer understanding of how cultural strategy leads to changes in systems and structures and how it plays out over time. But the opportunity to design evaluation for cultural strategy can provoke important questions

that also make us rethink evaluation more broadly.

When evaluation is based only on what are framed as concrete changes that build towards a pre-defined goal, there is a danger of erasing experiences and processes that are vitally important to people. A cultural strategy for belonging—because of its emphasis on process—presents an opportunity to be in better alignment with a praxis of belonging. Discrete and quantifiable assessments of impact and change are essential, but we should be wary of the presumption that we are building a new house brick by brick, and when its finished, no bad wolf will be able to blow it down. By doing this, we reinforce a linear, teleological conception of social change that looks to a static ending place. How would an evaluation take seriously Nina Simone's comment that "freedom" is the feeling of having no fear, and that this is a fleeting moment that she experienced at times on stage? How does evaluation value those moments of embodied freedom alongside questions of social, economic, and political change?

By including a focus on *process and experiences of process*, we can expand the lens of evaluation from a final goal of a society built on belonging, to how our current practices and processes reflect and create belonging now. In shifting evaluation efforts to instead developing an *inventory of traces*, we can see the ways that these many efforts contribute to and link with each other, thereby creating a deeper and more emergent notion of how change happens.

In this way, we might see belonging, justice, and liberation not as distant islands, but as something that is in constant change, tension and struggle, might be both material and deeply rooted in spirit and body, and the thousands of traces and processes we create, experience and fight for together.

## 4. Recognize and build on legacies of work and emerging practices

In a class that I teach about the relationship between artists and social movements, in our first weeks we look at the Young Lords' 1969 Garbage Offensive. The Young Lords analyzed the lack of public services such as trash pick-up in their predominantly Puerto Rican, East Harlem neighborhood as a function of systemic racism and classism.

## This is a key goal: to create a larger playing field of participation at all levels of practice.

As one response, the Young Lords cleaned up the trash from their neighborhood and used it to block a busy street. The action, known as the Garbage Offensive, presents a powerful balancing of symbolic and practical approaches, creating a clear and direct story of resilience and self-determination in the context of systemic disinvestment, while practically drawing public focus and creating an opportunity to organize other neighbors through the clean-up. Would the young organizers have called this cultural strategy? Were they envisioning that this action of picking up trash would come in front of hundreds of UC Berkeley students as a key text in their first year of college? Or that these images would be remounted in that same neighborhood fifty years later in the artist Miguel Luciano's project Mapping Resistance: The Young Lords in El Barrio, which revives and amplifies the work of the Young Lords and especially the work of photographer Hiram Maristany who documented many of the Young Lords actions.

As the field of arts and cultural strategy further professionalizes, builds a shared lexicon of understanding, and begins to attract funding to make it more sustainable, I think about those organizers. I think about the legacy of Sun Ra via Afrofuturism. I think about the fashion, hunger strikes, and signs of Alice Paul and other suffragettes. I think about the 1992 ashes action of ACT UP where lovers threw ashes of those who died from AIDS on the White House Lawn. I think about the danger and the uncertainty of so many of the legacies upon which this work is now built. The Allied Media Network principles share that, "Wherever there is a problem, there are already people acting on the problem in some fashion. Understanding those actions is the starting point for developing effective strategies to resolve the problem, so we focus on the solutions, not the problems."<sup>48</sup> It is important for all of us interested in and engaged in this work to recognize and build on these legacies and continually emerging practices through deep listening, and an openness and trust in building relationships with those at the frontlines of developing effective cultural strategies. ■

## APPENDICES

# Workshop and Resources for developing early ideas for cultural strategy projects

This workshop supports the development of early ideas for cultural strategy projects and can be used by practitioners and non-practitioners alike, in groups or individually. It should be used when there is a specific project, campaign or topic where you are looking to integrate cultural strategy. Ideally this occurs early on in your process in close collaboration with cultural strategy practitioners. It does not provide guidance on implementation.

# WORKSHOP AGENDA

## Suggested Time: 2 hours

Suggestions on timing in the agenda are based on a group of 15 people. Shorter and longer versions can be tailored to your context and needs.

## Materials Needed:

- [Attributes and Case Studies Slideshow\\*](#)
- [Cultural Strategy worksheet\\*](#)
- Paper, pens, post-it notes

\*These resources can also be downloaded from:

[haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/notesonaculturalstrategy/resources](https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/notesonaculturalstrategy/resources)

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## 1. Grounding

20 min

1. Start with a short meditation. This creates a break with whatever you/the group were just doing and can signal a shift in how you approach this process. If you are the facilitator or doing this alone, here is a sample script to guide your meditation:

“Take a moment to clear out your hands, close your computer, put away your food. If you’re able, place both feet flat on the ground and sit up, bringing your back away from your chair. If you’re comfortable with it, close your eyes. Now bring your attention to your breathing, just observing it come and go. You might notice your shoulders rising, or your belly expanding, short in-breaths or longer out-breaths. Just observe without trying to change it at all....now bring your attention to your nose and observe your breath as it comes in and out. Pay close attention to the difference in the in-breaths and out-breaths, maybe one is warmer or colder, shorter or longer, more forceful. Take a few moments to do this silently.

**Facilitators Note:** After giving time for people to do this you can invite people to take three breaths together.

...With eyes still closed, now reflect on a value that you learned from your community, your family, through a relationship and think about how you learned that value. What is the story of how you learned that value?”

2. Invite people to share their value, how they learned it, their name and pronouns.

**Facilitators Note:** Depending on group size or timing, this can be done in pairs or you can solicit 3-4 values from the group.

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## 2. Setting the Project Context

10 min

1. Invite people to reflect on the project/campaign/issue you are currently working on. If they are in a group where other people are working on the same issue, they should work with a partner. On the Cultural Strategy worksheet, complete the following:
  - Identify three challenges (these can be external or internal to the work)
  - Identify three goals of the project (what needs are you seeking to fulfill?)
2. Ask the group to circle two things that really excite them about the work from the list that they just compiled.

### 3. Identifying Relevant Cultural Strategy Attributes

10 min

1. Ask the pairs to review the 12 attributes of cultural strategy (don't worry about reviewing the case studies yet). Start with the titles, and when they peak your interest, read the longer description of them.

**Facilitator's Note:** Use the 12 attributes handout here

2. Reflecting on the challenges, goals and exciting things about the work, identify two of the attributes that could benefit your work in some way. You may want to build on something that excites you, or you may want to find a way to address a challenge. Note these in your worksheet.
- 

### 4. Analyzing Case Studies

20 min

1. Read through the case studies for these two attributes.

**Facilitators Note:** Use the Case Studies handouts here, people can also share, so that you don't need to print every page for everyone in the workshop unless you want people to have them as a future resource.

2. Of the six case studies you have just read, choose two that you are excited about or seem especially relevant to your work. Don't get caught up with the issue the case study focuses on when choosing your two case studies, think more about how the case study works.

3. With your partner analyze the case studies:

- What do you like about it?
- Does the case study build power, shift narrative, illuminate new understandings, activate people or something else?
- How does it use art or culture to shift to do the above?

**Facilitator's Note:** Depending on your group and timeframe, this can be a written analysis on the worksheet, drawn, spoken or you can ask people to act out their interpretation of the work

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### 5. Impossible Ideas

15 min

1. Three minute Exercise. By yourself, write down 5 impossible art or cultural strategy projects that relate to your project, and specifically the goal or challenge that you identified earlier as particularly exciting or important. Don't worry about funds or other constraints here and allow yourself to just write down whatever comes to mind, stream of conscious style. Chances are you won't be impossible enough to start, and sometimes your last idea is your best!

**Facilitator's Note:** People can sometimes get intimidated here. Encourage them by noting that these are "throwaway" and "draft" ideas. The goal is not to have a perfect idea, but just to get a lot of stuff on the page at first.

2. Share these with your partner and, between the two of you, circle your four favorite out of the ten total. Underline two of those four that you really like.
3. Choose the one to work with for today and write that on a notecard.
4. Take 3-4 examples from the larger group to share back.

## 6. Remix and Rework

20 min

1. Many of the case studies come out of histories of mashing together different practices, elements and tools—hip-hop, jazz, rasquachismo and on. Pulling on that, we are going to now take aspects from the case studies and integrate them in your impossible projects.
  2. On post-its, identify which aspects of the case study you want to integrate in your project and how they would adjust your project.
  3. On post-its, reflect on how the value you shared in the beginning is showing up in the project. If it isn't, how can it be better integrated somehow?
  4. Are there ways this can move from the realm of the impossible to the possible? How would it need to change?
    - For example, if your idea was to redesign the basketball jerseys of NBA players to include “Black Lives Matter”, maybe your “realm of the possible” is targeted distribution of Black Lives Matter t-shirts to players who wear them during their warm-ups...as has already happened!
  5. On a blank sheet, write/draw/diagram your new project idea. Tape this below your first idea and post-it notes.
- 

## 7. Initial Reflection on Your Idea

15 min

1. Gallery walk (5 min)—walk around the room to review the other project ideas and their development.
  2. Move into groups of four based on projects that are related to each other in some way (this isn't necessary, but helps create synergy). Ask each pair to provide feedback on the following questions:
    - What stakeholder assessment and relationships with cultural producers are needed?
    - Who might be impacted negatively by this project?
    - What worldview is this project reinforcing, amplifying or disrupting?
- 

## 8. Large Group

10 min

1. Group discussion: how can we see this coming into our work now and/or in the future?
2. Share a reflection on what aspect of the workshop was most challenging for you. Which was most generative?

**Workshop Acknowledgments:** This workshop design is informed by numerous projects and collaborations. In particular, the reflection on values comes from work developed with Pacita Rudder at Power California. The “impossible ideas” prompt is based on a workshop prompt that I learned from the Center for Artistic Activism.

# RESOURCES

The following resources can be downloaded from:  
[haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/notesonaculturalstrategy/resources](https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/notesonaculturalstrategy/resources)

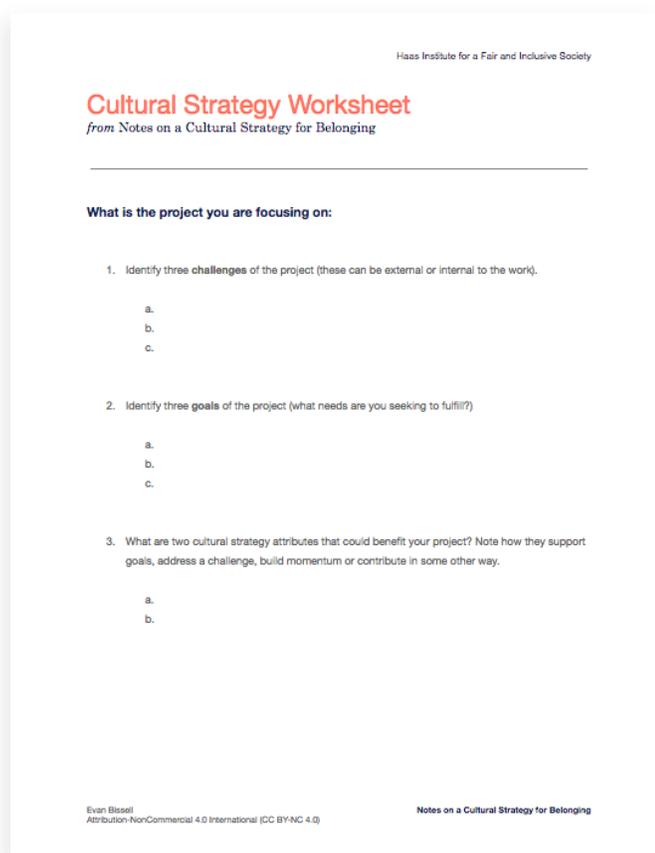
## Attributes and Case Studies Slideshow

DOWNLOAD



## Cultural Strategy worksheet

DOWNLOAD



# Endnotes

1. The 2018 Cultural Ambassadors Program was a partnership between the Haas Institute and Power California. The program was co-facilitated by Pacita Rudder and Evan Bissell and developed with Rufaro Gwarada and Gerald Lenoir. For more see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hye-hgUNRAXk> or <https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/grow-your-vote>
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5. See for example, Clifford Geertz framing that, "society's forms are culture's substance," in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 28.
6. Masha Gessen, "The Weaponization of National Belonging, from Nazi Germany to Trump," *The New Yorker*, July 21, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-weaponization-of-national-belonging-from-nazi-germany-to-trump>.
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8. Byron York, "In Politics Fight, Breitbart Knew Culture Is Key," *Washington Examiner*, March 1, 2012. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/in-politics-fight-breitbart-knew-culture-is-key>.
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11. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 137.
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13. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*
14. Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 315.
15. Notes from Laura Pulido's presentation at the Housing Justice in Unequal Cities Conference, hosted by the Institute on Inequality and Democracy, UCLA Luskin Center, February 1, 2019.
16. Carole Boyce Davies, "From Masquerade to Maskerade: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project," in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 213.
17. Jen Budney, "Other Ways of Knowing," in Franklin Sirmans, ed., *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 38.
18. Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, (London: Pluto Press, 2000).
19. Shannon Jackson, "Living Takes Many Forms," in Nato Thompson, ed., *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 93.
20. Rachel Godsil. "Mind Sciences and Creating New Narratives: The Fight to Define Who We Are," (Berkeley: Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, 2016) <https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/mind-sciences-and-creating-new-narratives>
21. Dorothy Cotton. "Ain't Scared of Your Jails." Video interview from [freedomring.org](https://freedomring.org) <https://freedomring.stanford.edu/?view=Thread&id=aint-scared-of-your-jails>
22. Godsil, *Mind Sciences*.
23. Kenneth Bailey and Lori Lobenstine, "Cultural Tactics," *Design Studio for Social Innovation*, 2016 [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53c7166ee4b0e7db-2be69480/t/5786671abebafb-1f79b0e8b2/1468426015449/ds4si\\_CulturalTactics.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53c7166ee4b0e7db-2be69480/t/5786671abebafb-1f79b0e8b2/1468426015449/ds4si_CulturalTactics.pdf)
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31. Lisa García-Bedolla and Melissa Michelson, *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through Get-Out-The-Vote Campaigns*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 15.
32. Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in: ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, *Media and Cultural Studies; Key Works*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Inc., 2006), 170-173.
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35. Roberto Bedoya, “Spatial Justice: Rasquachification, Race and the City,” *Creative Time Reports*, September 15, 2014, <http://creative-timereports.org/2014/09/15/spatial-justice-rasquachification-race-and-the-city/>.
36. Allied Media Network, “Network Principles,” Allied Media Projects, <https://alliedmedia.org/about/network-principles>
37. This is not to say that infrastructure doesn’t matter. See for example, Rashad Robinson’s important piece “Changing our Narrative about Narrative” (<https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/changing-our-narrative-about-narrative>) on the need for a better infrastructure and a better understanding of infrastructure or the Culture Group’s analysis of conservative attacks on cultural infrastructure in *Making Waves*. Despite this, many revelatory and revolutionary moments and movements of culture shift begin with makeshift infrastructure.
38. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1975), 2: 1363, as quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 25.
39. A phrase coined by Nayantara Sen during Cultural Strategy reading groups hosted by the Haas Institute and Race Forward during the summer and fall of 2019.
40. For more on the play and organizing process, see <http://www.juliasteeleallen.com/portfolio/mariposa/> A report detailing the organizing process for the play will be released in late 2019.
41. See for example “13 Key Principles for Working with Artists,” in Culture Group, *Making Waves*, 41-42.
42. See: <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/how-to-reimagine-the-world/>
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44. Jackson, *Living Takes Many Forms*.
45. See the strategy paper here: [https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/hew20.artsed\\_strategy.r4.1.pdf](https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/hew20.artsed_strategy.r4.1.pdf)
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A culture of belonging recognizes that we are always in a state of dynamic action and reaction. Belonging is never done and will constantly have to be remade. We're in the midst of constructing new ways to see and new ways to be.

As we move forward together in this time of rapid and concentrated change, the work of arts and culture will play a major role in how we lean into a future that says to everyone: You belong. This report provides some ideas for understanding some of the vital and visionary aspects of a cultural strategy for belonging.

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