From *Seven Seconds* to *When They See Us:*

How Color Of Change Is Transforming Narratives In Pop Culture

Social Change ↔ Arts ↔ Organizing ↔ Entertainment

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How Color Of Change is Transforming Narratives in Pop Culture

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Color Of Change (↗), the nation's largest online racial justice organization, with 1.5+ million members, helps people respond effectively to injustice and create a more humane and less hostile world for Black people in America. Through Color Of Change's Hollywood (↗) program, the organization drives culture and narrative change through a number of strategies, partnering with Hollywood insiders to offer services that improve representation of Black people in media.

WHY BUILD A CULTURE CHANGE STRATEGY AROUND TELEVISION?

Television, as a medium, invites audience members to become immersed in fictionalized story worlds, from the commonplace to the fantastical. Viewers become engrossed in storylines and attached to characters, falling in love (or in hate) with fictionalized story worlds that help them make sense of their own lives and the world around them.

Recognizing that television plays a profound role in shaping American culture, and acknowledging its undeniable effect on public perception and social behaviors, Color Of Change is leading efforts to remove harmful stories and stereotypes that affect Black people and communities.

Color Of Change is rolling out media, leading accountability campaigns, consulting and collaborating on content development, and conducting original research to expose critical problems in the industry and build momentum for industry change. As part of this work, Color Of Change Hollywood collaborates with entertainment industry insiders and influencers to change policies and practices that inform representation of Black people and issues affecting Black people.

In its multi-pronged culture change strategy, Color Of Change focuses on the police (or crime) procedural, one of television's most popular genres. First introduced through books featuring the likes of Sam Spade and Sherlock Holmes, and later translated to the small screen in serials like *Perry Mason* (1957-1966, in syndication) and *Matlock* (1986-1995), long-running, legal-themed series centered on high-profile defense attorneys. Later still, with television series like *Law & Order* (1990-2010) (amid a renewed national investment in "law and order" politics and policies), viewers were introduced

Color Of Change is leading efforts to remove harmful stories and stereotypes that affect Black people and communities.

to fictionalized accounts of interactions with the U.S. criminal justice system, through the lens of prosecutors and law enforcement—presenting a seemingly innocuous narrative that rationalizes and even glorifies going after the "bad guys" to get justice.

While this narrative arc of good prevailing over evil is as old as time, Color Of Change speaks (and responds) to the ways that these narratives—including exalting prosecution and vilifying criminal defense and/or defendants based on racist generalizations and stereotypes—play a role in shaping the larger political and cultural world. These portrayals, along with the oversimplification and/or misrepresentation of this country's legal system, have led to dangerous generalizations about "justice" and hold back progress on racial justice in the real world.

"When criminal justice is shown on TV, we see a system that is often times infallible. Over and over and over again—when we have [countless] statistics that show us that the system is flawed," Rashad Robinson, president of Color Of Change (↗), says. "In fact, there are systems and practices at [television] networks that say we cannot show police officers in certain ways. [T]hat is a rule that we have to change if we are going to create a new set of practices and a new understanding about the world."

Robinson, along with television producer and showrunner Veena Sud, co-wrote a 2018 *Variety* column (↗) that observed: "While law-and-order shows may provide many audiences with a certain escapism—a fantasy of white hats and black hats in a world of grays—these portrayals have a blast effect that goes beyond the screen. Research shows that inaccurate media portrayals perpetuate anti-black attitudes generally, resulting in police killing black people at higher rates, teachers treating black kids differently, employers treating black interviewees differently, doctors treating black patients differently, and voters supporting failed crime policies and mass incarceration because television shows imply these policies are necessary. The irony is that conservative pundits talk about Hollywood as a hotbed of liberal ideas—when our industry perpetuates some of the most harmful, regressive norms, especially when it comes to race and crime."

With a specific lens on its work on criminal justice, this report gives the behind-the-scenes story of how Color Of Change exposes systems of inequality and advances solutions for racial justice, by leveraging storytelling, relationship building, campaigning, and research to drive systemic change in Hollywood television and film writers rooms and beyond. Leading experts in narrative change strategies, Color Of Change takes an integrated approach to building power and capacity to disrupt the damaging narratives about Black people and communities that are prevalent in—and have profound impact on—the entertainment industry and its audience.

COLOR OF CHANGE'S NARRATIVE VISION

Color Of Change, the largest "next generation" racial justice organization, was founded in 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to provide a new kind of infrastructure to capture the energy, aspirations, and demands of Black people and their allies of every race. Leading campaigns that build real power for Black communities, challenge injustice, and hold corporate and political leaders accountable, and as Rashad says, "creat[e] a sense that those who are in power need to know that there are consequences for racism, there are consequences for behaviors that put [Black] community in peril." Color Of Change "pairs technology and media and organizing together… to build momentum and power, giving people the ability to collectively take action, and then translates that action into strategic cultural and political change."

In 2017, at the annual frank gathering (↗) hosted by the University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communications, Rashad spoke (↗) of television—specifically news media and daytime television—as a trigger and a space where Black people and communities are often "portrayed as undeserving of any empathy." He also defined a *theory of harm* in news media and television: "social conditions in this country [are] all blamed on Black people in some way… events involving people of color [are] reported with no perspective or analysis whatsoever, stories where Black people were implicated but [have] no real voice… the research is clear about these images, they affect how… everyone treats us. Even how we think about ourselves as Black people."
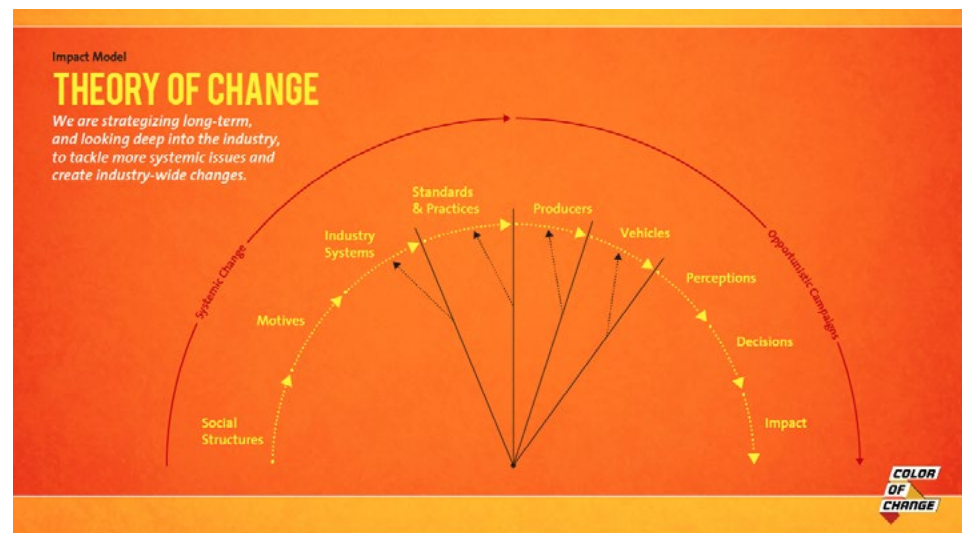
Color Of Change is intent on defining a *theory of change* focused on racial justice and creating a credible, viable set of strategies that will transform "presence into power" as Robinson often says, and change the rules of the systems and institutions that govern our society.

"The presence that our issues have or that we have as people… does not translate into the leverage required to make the change that we all need," Rashad says in his 2018 publication *Changing the Narrative About Narrative: The Infrastructure Required for Building Narrative Power* (Haas Institute) (↗). Instead, he says, narrative change—and narrative power—comes from a shift in orientation that includes:

- The ability to follow through on narrative and cultural dispersion and immersion, over time, across segments, and at scale.

- Authentic, talented, equipped, motivated, and networked people positioned and capable of creating new narratives and narrative change.

- Relationships with the brands (individual, corporate, and community-based) with the power and relationships responsible for the way people come to change their thinking, reshape their feelings, and redirect their behaviors.

Their Hollywood work is an extension of Color Of Change's efforts to change industries that affect Black communities. "We so often have to be thinking about the power that involves Washington, DC, and Capitol Hill. But often, it extends to Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood," he says. "We need more rule breakers in the area of storytelling who will not just be extractive on communities, or tell one side, but instead tell a full story that speaks to the root problems." (↗)

As part of Color Of Change's theory of change to reduce the harmful impact that inaccurate representations and stereotypes in the mainstream traditional news and entertainment media have on Black people, this graphic identifies the key systems, policies/practices, actors, and the role they play along a continuum. It also identifies where Color Of Change intercedes or disrupts these systems along specific points on the continuum. —Rashid Shabazz, Chief Marketing and Storytelling Officer, Color of Change.

Color Of Change is intent on defining a theory of change focused on racial justice and creating a credible, viable set of strategies that will transform "presence into power."

CONNECTING POLICY, ORGANIZING, AND NARRATIVE CHANGE STRATEGY

Pop culture (↗) itself includes the conversations, big ideas, major narratives, and immersive stories—films, TV shows, music, books, games, political speeches, journalism, and more—experienced by audiences of millions of people every day that have the power to change how they think, feel, and behave.

But Rashad warns (↗), "If we become consumed with the goal of getting our issues on the front page (presence), rather than implementing our values and solutions in the real world (power), we miss the point of narrative's role in social change. It's not about getting a great headline, or getting a storyline in one television show, or getting a few million video views. Those are necessary tactical executions, but they are not themselves a narrative strategy, which we often mistake them to be. The work is not nearly over when we achieve those objectives… we must follow through to ensure that we are immersing people in our worldview, giving them ways to express that worldview themselves and to reinforce it and paint their world with it."

To achieve this, Color Of Change's strategies build upon, translate, and adapt from the legacy of media advocacy work in the Black community stemming from the early pioneer work of the NAACP, including the Image Awards, first presented in 1968 and first televised in 1994. As early as 1915 (↗), the NAACP was confronting the misuse of media to influence public attitudes toward race, … [organizing] a nationwide protest against the negative portrayals of African Americans in *Birth of a Nation*. Other key examples of their work include work with politicians and studio executives to establish an ad hoc committee to monitor the image and portrayal of African Americans on screen (1942); filing a complaint with the FCC in 1955 about racial bias in the local news that ultimately resulted in the revocation of WLBT's (Jackson, MS) broadcast license (1969) (↗); and consistent legal pressure leading to the cancelation of *The Amos and Andy Show* (1966).

It was also informed by learning from the marriage equality movement and GLAAD, where Rashad served as the Senior Director of Media Programs from 2005 to 2011. In their report *Cultural Advocacy: A Non-Legal Approach to Fighting Defamation of Lesbian and Gays*, Craig J. Davidson and Michael G. Valentini explain that with the cultural advocacy goal of "full integration of the lesbian and gay community into 'mainstream' society… through strategies that generally do not involve legal or legislative process," GLAAD sought to fight defamation and invisibility using "three basic strategies: (1) mobilizing the lesbian and gay community to respond to good and bad media portrayals of lesbians and gays; (2) working directly with media professionals to improve their understanding of the lesbian and gay community; and (3) promoting lesbian and gay visbility through public education campaigns."

Davidson and Valentini also note GLAAD's early success in media activism, including challenges to homophobic language in the news, comedy, and music industries. Early on, GLAAD targeted Pat Buchanan, Eddie Murphy, and Guns N' Roses, among others; challenged stereotypes of lesbians and gays on television shows like *Quantum Leap* and *Mr. Belvedere*, and addressed the casual prejudice propagated by celebrities like Andy Rooney and Zsa Zsa Gabor and in popular culture, including hit movies like *Fried Green Tomatoes*, that normalized harmful rhetoric about or invisibilization of queer identity. Under Rashad's leadership, GLAAD's approach evolved to integrate a more intersectional framework into the organization's advocacy and major media campaigns, including its marriage equality initiatives.

"People don't experience issues. They experience life. And when you are able to articulate a problem, a path, and a solution in a way that people can follow, then you have the power to credibly move the infrastructure that moves the (popular) culture."

Color Of Change's own strategic, multilayered, three-part approach is driven by (1) audience activation, (2) narrative change infrastructure development, and (3) amplification. Color Of Change implements strategy that moves from "opportunistic" engagement (rapid response) to systemic change (transformation of power to change the rules governing access and representation) to amplification (using cultural tools to immerse audiences in a new or transformative idea that shifts cultural understanding).

Color Of Change bases its approach on the fundamental belief that ideas alone—ideas without people—can be dangerous, and it is necessary to both build trust with the entertainment industry as well as build and maintain trust with the community whose values are being (mis)represented by that industry. The work must be in service to something that people need or want in their lives for it to be meaningful, authentic, and transformative. "People don't experience issues," Rashad says. "They experience life. And when you are able to articulate a problem, a path, and a solution in a way that people can follow, then you have the power to credibly move the infrastructure that moves the [popular] culture."

Color Of Change knits its Hollywood narrative change work with its ongoing criminal justice reform organizing, such as ending money bail, ending profit incentives fueling mass incarceration, decriminalizing poverty and stopping

unnecessary prosecutions, implementing fair sentencing laws and sentence reductions, and stopping prison expansion and prison labor exploitation. It also includes efforts to hold police accountable and responsible for violence against Black people, and to call for prosecutorial accountability and reform by involvement in local district attorney elections.

Being able to engage in both rapid response campaigns as well as influential narrative change that engages mass audiences in the demand for systemic justice reform requires a strategic, interlocking relationship between organizing and narrative change strategies.

"In order to build the power to change the rules that keep racism in place, we need to build power around new stories that shape the content and playing field for our fights," Rashad says. "And we need to develop the infrastructure that can motivate our folks to take strategic action—in essence, our work must be rooted in strategies that make our people more powerful, not efforts that prove the effectiveness of individual tactics."

Through collaborative partnerships with entertainment industry leaders, Color Of Change leverages its social justice expertise on core issues such as police/prosecutorial misconduct or racial bias by 1) helping to inform television and film storylines or character development to change the narrative about Black people, culture, and community; 2) activating a robust organizing membership around a cultural product (e.g., film or television series) to uplift the social justice values and practices that are emerging across platforms and influencing mass audiences; and 3) creating organizing and research efforts to challenge and change the entertainment industry's policies and systems that inform decision-making by and around content and content creators.

ACTIVATING A CULTURE CHANGE STRATEGY IN TELEVISION

When Black people are talked about, Black people need to be in the room, and Black people need to be leading those discussions.
—**Rashad Robinson**

As a pathbreaking social justice organization, Color Of Change's Hollywood culture change work has introduced new ways for working with the entertainment industry. Its primary goals are to:

- Introduce more authentic Black stories by advising and consulting on story creation;

- Increase accountability on content among decision-makers (both publicly and behind the scenes);

- Build power for Black writers, producers, and creators and demanding more diversity in writers' rooms;

- Work with influencers to leverage their voices in conversations about socially conscious storytelling and decision-making; and

- Amplify the work that has the ability to move people from analysis to action, or to influence opinions through its reach or intervention.

Specific to working in television, and television writers rooms where storylines are conceived and developed, Color Of Change prioritizes creating support and conversation that allow writers and other industry leaders to learn from experts and engage in an open dialogue about issues and nuances of character or storyline, without compromising the autonomous creative space in the writers room.

Working in television writers rooms is an ongoing learning and testing process. Consultants too often are brought in to provide feedback when a show or script is nearly complete and asked to confirm already decided details or affirm storytelling strategy, rather than inform the approach and support nuanced, authentic character development.

Kristen Marston, Color Of Change's Culture & Entertainment Advocacy Director, points out some of the challenges to these conversations. "Some of the barriers are symptomatic of the industry. It's a fast-paced industry, but what does it mean when content is cranked out so fast that you haven't had time to think it through? It's also politics, not everybody who wants to have Color Of Change in the writers room has the clout, depending on their level as a writer," she says. "It's our job to try to navigate some of those things and build awareness. We're coming in to have a conversation and support teams of artists in whatever way we can."

"In order to build the power to change the rules that keep racism in place, we need to build power around new stories that shape the content and playing field for our fights."

Gaining access to writers rooms from the beginning, being invited to collaborate and share expertise, requires the building of relationships, trust, and process. Social justice organizations that serve as consultants to television and film writers must first establish credibility, "brand recognition," and capacity for sharing knowledgeable, relevant, informative, and helpful advice.
To build that expertise and credibility, while also focusing on removing barriers to access, participation, success, and opportunity in the industry, Color Of Change actively engages the television writers, producers, and showrunners around big narrative ideas and content development in multiple ways including:

- **Salons.** Salons organized by Color Of Change are formal and informal gatherings of creative leadership, artists, visionaries, and professionals in Hollywood and in social justice movements focused on narrative change work. The salons provide a critical way for people to build relationships and share expertise and experiences, sometimes through uncomfortable, but crucial conversations that can lead to the creation, production, and dissemination of creative content that reshapes narratives to focus on more authentic, complex, nuanced stories of Black people and communities.

  In 2019 alone, Color Of Change has convened salons with more than 80 showrunners, screenwriters, producers, executives, and other content gatekeepers to discuss content and development practices, images, and storytelling. Some of the salon topics include how to build effective pipeline intervention programs, how to incorporate storylines that cover systems of racism and criminal justice in mainstream works, and developing "Rooney Rule"–style affirmative action measures to increase diversity in the executive ranks. Some co-host conveners of the salons include Sunil Nayer (Showrunner, *Red Line*), Tony Camerino (Writer/Producer, *Taken*), and Anthony Sparks (Showrunner, *Queen Sugar*).

- **Writers Room Consultations.** As an outgrowth of the salons and their work towards building relationships in the industry, Color Of Change has consulted with writers of the ABC primetime dramas *How to Get Away with Murder* and *Grey's Anatomy*. They've also consulted with the writers rooms for *Queen Sugar* (OWN), *Surviving R. Kelly* (Lifetime), *Red Line* (CBS), and *Seven Seconds* (Netflix). Moreover, in addition to regular consulting with writers rooms, Color Of Change partners with The Black List, The Writers Guild, and other industry organizations to host trainings for writers, producers, and professionals covering topics including implicit bias, criminal justice in narratives, becoming a staff writer, using the best experts, and white privilege.

- **Work with Influencers.** Major social change has never happened without cultural influencers adding their voices. Color Of Change works with top talent in Hollywood (and the music industry) to help them make effective statements in the media, and star in videos that educate people on important issues, engage community and industry leaders in transformative conversation (salons), and advance campaigns that deliver real change. Some of the artists Color Of Change in television has worked with are Chris Rock and Keegan-Michael Key on voting access, Ava DuVernay and Kendrick Sampson on anti-Black violence, Matt McGorry on encouraging white people to lean into difficult conversations about race, Common on youth development and criminal justice reform, and Yara Shahidi on youth activism and Black representation in Hollywood.

While Color Of Change uses various strategies to work with Hollywood, the following two examples exemplify elements of their cultural and narrative change strategies and demonstrates the power and influence of embarking on a shared process that values the social justice expertise in organizing, policy change, and creative interventions manifested through authentic long-term relationships built on trust:

1. In service of building the institutional infrastructure needed to inform, and transform narrative, with television writer, director, producer Veena Sud in collaboration on *Seven Seconds.*

2. In service of building the relationships, infrastructure, and capacity to leverage cultural tools (e.g., film and television) to amplify narrative change, with film director, producer, writer Ava Duvernay in collaboration on *When They See Us.*

Seven Seconds: Providing expertise to tell an authentic story

In Hollywood, it truly takes a village to make a TV show that doesn't focus on one person, one voice, or one showrunner. With my partnership with Color of Change early on, our writers room felt like one of the more diverse places in Hollywood. There has to be a sea change in how we find and tell these stories, which extends to who we employ and who we consult with. Who is greenlighting our stories, and who is critiquing them and writing about the nuances of our crafted narratives? Are they paying attention to them or are they ignoring them? There are so many ways in which a person can go into telling a story in all its truths and in all its conventions, but that can only come with authenticity. —**Veena Sud, Vice** (↗)

In 2018, Netflix introduced Seven Seconds, a 10-episode series that "tackles (↗) the thorny issue of race in America through the story involving a hit-and-run of an African-American teenager by a Jersey City cop, and the crime's subsequent coverup by the mostly white police force." The series features

KJ, a young black woman and troubled assistant prosecutor assigned to the case, as racial tensions—and a web of police corruption—make it seemingly impossible to get justice for the crime.

Production for *Seven Seconds* began in 2016 (↗) when showrunner and creator Veena Sud along with Director Gavin O' Connor began adapting the story from the 2013 Russian action movie *The Major (Майор).*

Behind the scenes, building on a relationship that began at a Color Of Change salon, Rashad and former Color of Change team member Brian Walker began a close collaboration with Veena to give the criminal justice storyline a real-life dimension rarely seen in crime procedurals. For more than two years they worked to reimagine the roles (↗) of cops, victims, prosecutors, and communities in order to tell a different kind of story.

Color Of Change shared its expertise (↗) on the inner workings of the criminal justice system that helped story development, along with sharing testimony from victims' families and people in law enforcement. For a complex story that presents characters with varied perspectives, a collaboration like the one between Color Of Change and Sud and her writers room not only helped channel more accurate information but also allowed for the development of more authentic characters and representations of Black communities and individuals, "shifting momentum away from reinforcing the worst practices of the crime procedural genre and toward reshaping it as a force for challenging society to see the criminal justice system critically."

The organization also connected writers to community stakeholders directly affected by the criminal justice system to offer feedback to the writers. As Veena notes (↗) , "All of the [*Seven Seconds*] writers were consulting mothers whose children were killed by police in Baltimore and the eastern side of the States."

True-to-life stories created alongside individuals directly affected by the issue is a practice that rarely takes place in television writers rooms. As Rashad notes (↗): "What we do know, however—from the conversations we've seen online, and the folks who reached out to us after they heard of our involvement in the writers room with Veena—is that there's an intense appreciation for these true-to-life stories."

Color Of Change shared its expertise on the inner workings of the criminal justice system that helped story development, along with sharing testimony from victims' families and people in law enforcement.

Besides offering their expertise and direct connection to community stake-holders to the writers of *Seven Seconds*, Color Of Change was also able to connect the episodic storytelling with growing momentum surrounding their organizing to end cash bail.

A scene in the series that accurately portrays the mundanity of a bail hearing, and ties into the burgeoning movement to end cash bail, which often keeps poor people of color incarcerated—is directly tied to real-life courtroom ex-periences that (↗) Color Of Change was able to share with the show writers. As is another scene in the series where the main prosecutor is seen push-ing back on a judge for an unjust decision, which was partially inspired by a real-life video Color Of Change brought into the writers room.

As a compelling stand-alone story, *Seven Seconds* ran for one season on Netflix. According to *The Hollywood Reporter* (↗), the Netflix original content production had a 77% rating among critics and 84% score among those who watched it. The show's lead, Regina King, won an Emmy (↗) as Outstanding Lead Actress in a Limited Series or Movie.

When They See Us: Inspiring mass audience action in partnership with a limited television series

Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us*, a Netflix limited series (2019), is based on the real life story of five teenagers: Raymond Santana, Kevin Richardson, Korey Wise, Yusef Salaam, and Antron McCray (collectively known as the Ex-onerated 5), who were wrongfully accused and incarcerated for the rape and assault of a white female jogger in Central Park (New York City) in 1989 and fully exonerated in 2003.

The series recounts the mental and physical anguish each of the five young men endured while interrogated, prosecuted, and incarcerated, as well the difficulties they encountered including dealing with ongoing stigma and barriers of having been incarcerated. The series is an exposé in the many ways our justice system is broken, and underscores the need to address the biases and corruption plaguing police departments and courts in America.

"It's important for people to watch [*When They See Us*] because it shows all of the different ways that the system and the incentive structures of the system are set up to put people in harm's way, to not deliver safety and to not deliver justice," Rashad says. "And we have to tune in to these things, but more than tune in to them, we also have to take that anger and that outrage and turn it into real action."

In the post-production phase of *When They See Us*, the Color Of Change team was brought in by Ava and the PR department of Netflix to help in the planning of rollout and marketing strategies. The invitation was extended as part of an ongoing relationship between Color Of Change and Ava, who worked together to organize nationwide community screenings for her previous award-winning film *Selma* (2014) and *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018). Ava was also the inaugural guest in Color Of Change's podcast #TellBlackStories, launched at Sundance (↗) in 2019, and has been in conversation with Rashad on numerous occasions and stages discussing the synergies of socially conscious storytelling and the telling of Black stories.

"These are going into our bloodstream, these stories. They go into our DNA," Ava says (↗) in her #TellBlackStories podcast with Color Of Change. "They become a part of our mind, our memory. So we really have to be more rigorous in our examination of what we accept."

When They See Us is one of the most-watched series in Netflix history, with over 23 million accounts (↗) having tuned to the four-part series worldwide. The series collected 16 Emmy nominations (↗), including Outstanding Limited Series, and Jharrel Jerome won Outstanding Lead Actor for his portrayal of Korey Wise.

Color Of Change, along with other social justice organizations, was instrumental in using the series' release to amplify an immersive narrative of justice. In their partnership with Netflix and DuVernay, Color Of Change offered feedback on the types of language and images young audiences of color should be exposed to that would inspire action. The goal was to ensure that new audiences, especially young people of color, had outlets to direct their outrage into real activities.

Translating narrative and story to action, the partnership created a pathway and opportunity for new audiences to connect to a larger movement for prosecutorial accountability through Color Of Change's campaign platform, Winning Justice, and a specific discussion guide, resources, and toolkit for *When They See Us*.

"It's important for people to watch [*When They See Us*] because it shows all of the different ways that the system and the incentive structures of the system are set up to put people in harm's way, to not deliver safety and to not deliver justice."

The guide is designed to help audiences explore the themes in the series, and identify ways in which they can take action including demanding prosecutorial accountability and ending life without parole sentences for juvenile youth, as well as know-your-rights resources. The website features four campaign actions, including: 1) take action in building prosecutorial accountability; 2) take action to protect the rights of youth; 3) learn more about youth in the criminal justice system; and 4) learn more about how specific media can dehumanize Black people. These actions are linked to further learning materials, including reports, a campaign, and a petition sharing Color Of Change's research and policy initiatives with new and activated audiences.

To support the release of the film series, Color Of Change hosted tastemakers watch parties and screenings in strategic locations for their members, creative producers, and the general public. Inviting viewers to engage in talkbacks about *When They See Us*, hosted by Joy Reid (MSNBC) with panelists including Alicia Garza (co-founder of Black Lives Matter), Darnell Moore (author/activist), Dianna Hoskins (JustLeadershipUSA) at locations like the Schomburg Center (Harlem, NY) and a salon in Hollywood. The salon included creatives, activists and advocates, and entertainment industry decision-makers who talked about ways they can create, develop, and produce more socially conscious content.

The film also inspired audiences to hold lead prosecutor Linda Fairstein and former Columbia Law Professor Elizabeth Lederer accountable for their complicity in accusing and convicting the Exonerated 5. Color Of Change helped organize a widely shared petition demanding that publisher Simon & Schuster (↗) drop their publishing contract with Linda Fairstein, holding the publisher accountable for profiting on storytelling based largely on Fairstein's prosecutorial experience (more than 33,000 signed). While Simon & Schuster has not cancelled Linda Fairstein's contract, Dutton, a division of Penguin Random House, announced they will no longer be publishing books by Linda Fairstein. *When They See Us* viewers were also behind the twitter hashtag #CancelLindaFairstein (↗), which forced Fairstein to resign from numerous nonprofit boards and sever ties with her literary agency, ICM Partners.

The collaboration between Color Of Change and Ava DuVernay demonstrates that strategic organizing, based on long-standing relationships and expertise, in coordination with entertainment industry storytelling, based on authentic storytelling, can turn viewers into activated audiences that can have a real impact on justice.

METHODOLOGY: HOW HAS COLOR OF CHANGE BUILT ITS CULTURE CHANGE PRACTICE?

While on the surface, the collaborations between the entertainment industry and Color Of Change appear straightforward and seamless, the reality is that Color Of Change has built the necessary internal expertise and infrastructure to manage multiple and ongoing interventions and sustain deep relationship building.

Build the Team. The origins of Color Of Change's culture change work begins with expert leadership under the direction of Rashad Robinson, who became president of Color Of Change in 2011. With support from visionary philanthropic leaders and encouraged by Rashad's successful LGBTQ+ Hollywood initiatives with GLAAD, Color Of Change embarked on early interventions that included independent commissioned research, investment in narrative strategy, and partnerships with forward-looking and risk-taking entertainment industry leaders.

During Rashad's early years, with a staff of fewer than 10 people, Color Of Change began to tackle media and entertainment influence by addressing Donald Trump's racially charged political commentary attacking President Obama's heritage and ethnicity (tied to the "birther conspiracy") on *Celebrity Apprentice*. It was one of the early campaigns that forefronted the strategy to (re)direct media corporations, celebrities, and (passive and activated) viewers that enable racism.

Early support from Open Society Foundations helped expand the Hollywood work and allowed Rashad and team to conduct industry research led by writer, director and filmmaker dream hampton. This research identified key areas where Color Of Change could best intervene to drive systems and culture change. It was also during this period that Color Of Change's Arisha Hatch, Vice President and Chief of Campaigns, and Brandi Dexter-Collins, Senior Campaign Director, began to organize, and win, multiple accountability campaigns, such as canceling *COPS* on FOX, and pressuring *Saturday Night Live* to hire Black women both in front of the camera and behind it.

In 2016, Brian Walker joined Color Of Change to lead the Hollywood Project, where he organized numerous salons that led to justice-driven relationships with creatives, producers, and other decision-makers in Hollywood. (Walker is currently Manager of Enterprise, Diversity, and Inclusion at Disney.)

In 2017, Rashid Shabazz joined the team as Chief Marketing and Storytelling Officer, leading Color Of Change Hollywood, among other storytelling, marketing, and communications initiatives. Dedicated to creating more accurate and authentic portrayals of Black people in movies and on TV, the team also

includes Kristen Marston, Culture and Entertainment Advocacy Director, formerly of Define American, who has years of experience cultivating relationships in Hollywood.

Philanthropy played a pivotal role in the experimentation and evolution of Color Of Change's culture change strategy by providing the opportunity to expand organizational talent and capacity. For example, a $2 million grant from Atlantic Philanthropies helped Color Of Change build its Hollywood office and hire Brian, which precipitated more sustained engagement in the entertainment industry from Los Angeles to Sundance to Atlanta to New York.

Produce Research. Color Of Change commissions and develops entertainment industry–focused research on policies, systems, and content development models that exacerbate inequities in the industry as well as affect the narratives and stories that come out of it. This research provides Color Of Change with the expertise to speak to the inequitable practices in the entertainment industry with authority.

In 2017, Color Of Change released *Race in the Writers Room: How Hollywood Whitewashes the Stories That Shape America* (↗), which showed how executives running television platforms, both traditional networks and emerging streaming sites, are not hiring Black showrunners, and in effect excluding or isolating Black writers in writers rooms and in the creative process. The report found that over 90% of showrunners are white, two-thirds of shows had no Black writers at all, and another 17% of shows had just one Black writer. Color Of Change was also able to create a narrative change rating system to not only identify the problem but establish a standard by which to hold the industry accountable and provide a roadmap for studios and networks to improve.

Philanthropy played a pivotal role in the experimentation and evolution of Color Of Change's culture change strategy by providing the opportunity to expand organizational talent and capacity.

"Good research alone isn't power. What is key about this work is not that we released a study, which advocacy organizations do every day. The work here is about identifying a strategic lever, which for us is the idea that greater diversity in writers rooms can be a force multiplier for the the of content we would like to see," Rashad says. "Showcasing the lack of diversity, the barriers to change, and then building campaigns and inside/outside efforts that force changes, is rooted in the understanding that in order to be effective, you need a solid theory of change and the infrastructure to drive that theory."

Support Partnerships. Color Of Change's ability to convene and build partnerships, in the entertainment industry is sustained by the organization's ability to build genuine and thoughtful relationships around shared goals and intentions through their salons, writers room consultations, influencer relationships, and more. Color Of Change maintains ongoing communication with both industry executives and content creators that requires constant follow-up and team bandwidth.

Additionally, the more presence Color Of Change has among entertainment industry professionals, the more these industries rely on Color Of Change to reflect on their own practices and contributions to society. As Kristen notes, "We bring real world issues and break them down in a way that people don't have time to do. It creates a space for people in the entertainment industry to not know everything... and create a space where they feel they can call anytime."

Create Accountability. Color Of Change is not only working with creatives to build new narratives, but launched its initial culture change strategy to hold accountable those who are advancing negative portrayals. Through their community organizing efforts, they forced *COPS* off of FOX and canceled *All My Babies' Mamas* before it ever aired on Oxygen, and fought and won to have *Akil the Fugitive Hunter* removed and canceled from A&E's channels and platforms.

As part of this work, both through public comments and behind-the scenes organizing, the Color Of Change team has worked to raise industry standards in the hiring of more Black creatives, resulting in more accurate and balanced representations; more authentic Black stories; more diversity in writers rooms and among decision-makers; and real accountability when media companies cross the line.

FINDINGS

- An organization's **pop culture for social change strategy is multi-pronged, long-term**, and requires:

  - Investment and expertise (leadership, staff and/or consultants) in the design of a narrative vision, theory of change, and identification of targeted audiences;

  - A commitment to building an organization-wide understanding of the role of culture change to advance its overall mission;

  - The ability to advance strategic experimental initiatives to learn, identify, assess, and hone in on the campaigns, tactics, and relationships needed to advance that vision;

  - The capacity, knowledge, and skills to build, maintain, and advance multiple levels of relationships, consultations, and active partnerships with the entertainment (and other mass media) industry around multiple rapid response and longer-term initiatives at the same time;

  - The skills to engage in mass audience activation through strong digital and earned media campaigns.

- **Culture change strategy should not be done in isolation.** It is deeply integral to, and should be integrated with, organizing and policy change goals. When culture change strategies (e.g., audience engagement campaigns, culture change research, storyline development, cross-sector collaborations) connect with policy and organizing solutions, it can exponentially increase impact in all areas.

- **Successful cross-sector partnerships between social movements and entertainment** require a deep commitment of time, staff and leadership with the skills to understand each other and the capacity to work together, and the formation of trust on all sides.

- **Know your political and cultural power.** Designing a culture change strategy starts with a frank analysis of your community's particular political, economic and cultural power. How these assets are leveraged to create and advance narrative and culture change goals is unique to each community. Color of Change's model is rooted in their analysis of the historical power of the Black community as a political voting bloc, as well as a driver of cultural influence and economic growth. It should not be assumed that the wholesale replication of their model can be applied to other organizations or communities whose power and assets may be different.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Pop Culture Collaborative has invested in its grantees along a strategic, field-building continuum: **Pathbreakers,** who have been doing this work for many years, where needs include the ability to move deeper into collaboration in the industry, expand capacity and thought leadership, and engage in mass audience activation strategies at scale; **Early Adopters,** who have great experience in the pop culture for social change field, but may not have long-term culture change goals and strategies in place, where philanthropic support can help to build strategy, increase capacity, and begin testing new approaches; and **New Recruits,** who are relatively new to the culture change space, but important to grow the community around narrative change goals, engage in early testing, and engage in the broader pop culture for social change field to collaboratively build strategy and partnerships.

For social justice organizations engaging in pop culture for social change, the Pop Culture Collaborative recommends that foundations and donors:

- **Support multi-year investments in pop culture for social change strategy.** This infusion of support, especially early in the development of a culture and narrative change strategy, affects the trajectory and success of organizational-led pop culture for social change and narrative strategies.

- **Provide general operating support that specifically includes narrative or culture change strategies as an integral component of the funded work.** This proactive inclusion strengthens the overall organization, and also provides it with the ability to engage in culture change design, experimentation, and learning.

- **Create grant programs that offer core support for narrative and culture change programs, strategies, and projects.** As an organization's strategy evolves and stabilizes based on early experimentations and learnings, core support for an organization's culture change program, and specific affiliated projects, helps organizations maintain and expand capacity (via consultants and staff), engage in cross-sector partnerships and/or consultations, nimbly advance rapid response narrative campaigns and advance long-term campaigns.

- **Offer support for pathbreaking leaders to provide peer mentorship that builds the field.** Similar to other pathbreaking social justice organizations advancing long-term pop culture for social change strategies (such as the National Domestic Workers Alliance and Define American), Color Of Change is building infrastructure both for their own work, but also for the movement, through ongoing peer-to-peer mentorship, learning, and partnership investments. Pathbreakers will be called on more to do this type of educating, infrastructure, and field-building role. Philanthropy can include a budget line item in grantee's budgets for mentorship to new and emerging field actors.

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