that your economic status is a choice, that you don't work hard enough if you're poor.
What is a trope you’ve learned about poverty or wealth? Where did you hear that message?
BROKE is an intervention for the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors to communicate justly about how the rich got rich and how the poor stay poor.
WHAT WE’LL COVER

What we learned collaborating across organizations
What we learned studying how organizations are telling stories
How to tell stories about economic inequality and solutions for systems change
How we approached design with intention
WHAT WE LEARNED FROM COLLABORATING
PUSHING THE BOUNDS OF PHILANTHROPY
+
WORKING ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS & ORGANIZATIONAL NORMS
CROSS-DISCIPLINE COLLABORATION

DESIGN

SCIENCE OF STORYTELLING

NARRATIVE POWER
What are some things you would like to do, but feel restricted by the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors?
2. WHAT WE LEARNED
STUDYING HOW
ORGANIZATIONS ARE TELLING STORIES
WHAT WE DID

Literature Review
Content Analysis
Interviews
LOOKING BACK AT NARRATIVES OF POVERTY AND WEALTH
Pre-colonization/pre-capitalism:
Reciprocity
Interdependence
Care

Gift economies.
1600s: Predestination
The “undeserving poor”

Protestant Work Ethic
Work and wealth as morally good
NARRATIVE HISTORY

1800s: Individualism (aka Bootstraps/Meritocracy myth)
Blames individuals for their failures, credits them for their successes.
What are some narratives around poverty/wealth that you see nonprofits and philanthropy using?
LITERATURE REVIEW
5 CASE STUDIES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAPER</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION(S)</th>
<th>CITATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You start with the youth: Narratives of deservingness and dissent at a homeless service organization”</td>
<td>West Coast Youth, a pseudonym for an organization serving homeless youth</td>
<td>Yarbrough, D. (2021). “You start with the youth: Narratives of deservingness and dissent at a homeless service organization.” Sociological Perspectives, 07311214210109431.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Organizations share partial stories about poor people, only sharing aspects of their lives related to being poor or getting out of poverty.

Stories about people in other countries over simplify [AC or glorify] poverty by featuring people in pastoral settings.

Organizations share stories of individuals who were able to become contributing members of a capitalist society by joining the middle class or starting businesses.

People who live in poverty are often absent from the stories told about them.

The stories told promote individual-level change over system-level change, even when the organization acknowledges systemic changes are needed.

Organizations do not share many stories about wealth.
CONTENT ANALYSIS
10 ORGANIZATIONS +
27 PIECES OF CONTENT
A RUBRIC FOR TELLING STORIES THAT TRANSFORM PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY

Stories are the most powerful tool we have as changemakers. They can shift perspectives by helping people understand what economic injustice feels like and how it came to be. They can also inspire people to act.

Use this rubric to determine whether your story is likely to be effective in shifting mindsets around the issues you’re working on, without reinforcing harmful pervasive narratives.

Are you using the narrative arc?

Which plot structures does your story use? Check all that apply. (If it’s one that’s used all the time, consider shifting to one less often used. In our research for this project, we saw that many organizations are using the overcoming the monster plot structure more than any other.)

- Overcoming the monster, in which a group of people work together to defeat a common threat to self or country
- Rags to riches, in which a character has nothing, gains everything, loses it, and then gains it for good, often after the demise or misfortune of their adversaries
- Comedy, in which a series of ridiculous or funny events result in a happy ending
- Tragedy, in which an otherwise likable character has a deep moral flaw that results in their demise or that of others
- The quest, in which a character or group of characters seeks an answer, event, or object
- Voyage and return, in which the central character travels to a new place and returns transformed
- Rebirth, in which a character either gains a new perspective or helps others do so, which results in a shared new and improved reality

What do you want people who hear this story to do (i.e., take a specific action)?

Given what you want them to do, what do you want people who hear this story to feel? Focus on positive emotions like pride, hope, love, awe, and parental love, which are associated with agency and action.
Are systems of inequality and how they operate to oppress poor people central to the story (for more on this, review the systems worksheet)? These could include:

- Structural barriers to choice and access
- Explicit acknowledgment of white supremacy, racism, capitalism, classism, or patriarchy
- A systemic, not individual, root of the challenge facing central characters

Is the conflict between the central character and another character, or between the character and a system?

Which aspects of the system are you highlighting in your story with character and setting choices to illustrate the root cause of conflict?

- Historical
- Political
- Geographical
- Social
- Economic

Are racism, classism, sexism, and ableism made explicit and central to the story? How are these visible in the story?

Are you featuring the experiences of poor people authentically? Have you included specific cultural details and experiences (e.g., cultural authenticity vs. generalizations and simplifications)?

Whose point of view is the story written from? (Most often, this should be the perspective of the individuals who are most affected.) How does that point of view bring audiences into the story?

If the story is not being told by those most affected, are you featuring the experiences of poor people authentically? Have you included specific cultural details and experiences (e.g., cultural authenticity vs. generalizations and simplifications)?

Who is the hero in the story? Is it your organization? How can you make affected communities or allies the hero?

How does the affected community express its agency? What does their power look like?
Is the villain or source of the problem a system rather than a single individual?

Does this story uphold any common harmful tropes or narratives? Check all that apply

- American Dream
- Deservingness
- Personal responsibility as a source of problem and solution
- Bootstraps worldview
- White savior
- Welfare queen
- Participation in capitalism as an ideal outcome
- Other

Did this story challenge any of these? If yes, how so?

- Y/N
- How:

Do the underlying values in the story or moral of the story focus on:

- Reparations
- Justice
- Fairness
- Reducing harm to poor people
- Interdependence
- Reciprocity
- Community care
- Solidarity
- Mutual aid
- Other

Survey inspired by:
41% of the stories framed poor people as being in need of saving.

31% Of stories included reference to systems of oppression. However, more than half did not reference race and racism.

40% Of stories represented poor people as a homogenous group of people.

70% of the stories featured organizations with power. Less than half of the stories included characters as having power.

75% of the organizations were not telling stories with a beginning, middle and end, conflict and resolution; characters and setting.

Based on analysis of 27 pieces of content from 10 organizations
What are your reflections on these findings?
3. HOW TO TELL STORIES ABOUT ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND SOLUTIONS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE
BRIGHT SPOTS

Coalition of Immokalee Farm Workers

Southerners on New Ground

Migrant Justice

Invisible People

Action Center on Race and the Economy

Economic Security Project
1. Tell stories about individuals navigating systems and engaging in collective action to disrupt power
2. Create space for people to come together and talk about systems
3. Problematize current narratives
4. Use justice frames in storytelling
5. Build the capacity of communities to share stories
6. Use visual images and language to engage communities
7. Be intentional with the language you use
8. Amplify stories—ethically
1. Tell stories about individuals navigating systems and engaging in collective action to disrupt power

4. Use justice frames in storytelling
5. Build the capacity of communities to share stories

8. Amplify stories—ethically
TELL STORIES ABOUT SYSTEMS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION
WE ORGANIZE
We Build Power, We Win
HOW CAN YOU TELL STORIES THAT FEATURE SYSTEMS AS SETTINGS AND CHARACTERS ENGAGING IN COLLECTIVE ACTION?
USE JUSTICE FRAMES IN STORYTELLING
YOUR TURN

HOW CAN YOU FRAME THE PROBLEM AND SOLUTION AS IN/JUSTICE?
BUILD THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES TO SHARE THEIR STORIES
Human Rights

Derechos Humanos

Migrant Justice
THINK ABOUT THIS

HOW WILL YOU WORK WITH COMMUNITIES TO TELL THEIR OWN STORIES?
AMPLIFY STORIES—ETHICALLY
American Dreaming:
The Roadmap to Resilience for Undocumented Storytellers

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**Recommendations**

We will ask: Is now a good time to share your story? How have you been since we last connected?
- We will offer ways to scale down the work or provide a way of stepping away from the project if necessary.

We will ask: What do you feel comfortable sharing now?
- We will use the answer as a guide for healthy boundaries in our collaborations and will not ask for additional details or efforts.

We will ask: Have you shared your this story before?
- We will facilitate training and give guidance to lay a foundation for good health and well-being in the storytelling community.

We will offer a scope of work, compensation, and a timeline for involvement, and ask if it feels in line with your expectations.

We will design ways of seeking feedback and suggestions for nurturing storytellers’ mental health and well-being within our work.

We will hold others we work with, particularly in the media, accountable for honoring your contributions.
- For pronouncing and spelling your names correctly
- For honoring your gender identity and pronouns
- For being forthcoming and transparent about when conversations are “on the record” or “off the record”
- For including you in the decision-making process around your stories
- When possible, sending you a draft of the story write-up before it publishes or being open to edits after a story has published if you, as the storyteller, feel uneasy about story details
- For following up with a link to a written/recorded story once it is published
- For simply thanking a storyteller for their time and vulnerability when sharing their story
HOW WILL YOU TAKE CARE OF THE STORYTELLERS?
"The cows don't milk themselves"
4. HOW WE APPROACHED DESIGN WITH INTENTION
“THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IS TO MAKE THE REVOLUTION IRRESISTIBLE.”

- Toni Cade Bambara
Dignity and Power:
Telling truth and seeking justice in a broken economic system.

Empowering and transformative storyteller.

PROVOKE  ○  ILLUMINATE

INSPIRE  ○  ENGAGE

REWRITE

Lister  ○  Storyteller
Forward Thinker  ○  Truth Speaker
Teacher  ○  Strategist
Relentless  ○  Unrelenting
Powerful  ○  Empowering
Intersectional  ○  Open

CHARACTERISTICS
VISUAL TREATMENT

We are Flesh. The delicacy of marble and the brutality of concrete. The limbo between the heretic and the divine. We have no barriers, no borders.

We are film.
HOW THE NONPROFIT AND PHILANTHROPIC SECTORS ARE TALKING ABOUT POVERTY—and how we can do better

Despite considerable grassroots energy and a body of tools and resources on progressive solutions, the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors are rearticulating responses, victim blaming, racial profiling, and fear of poverty. Too many organizations still rely on self-help solutions and still fear to confront poverty. These are tactics that disempower some poor people or more damaging than others, and thus our narratives require a recalibration of how we talk about poverty but falls short of justice and meaningful action.

As the 21st century, in the age of the fourth industrial revolution, our readers are in communities about class, socioeconomic status (SES), and poverty. Social determinants are more important than ever and the role of wealth, and quality of life in ways that do not continue to disadvantage one group or any type of work on race. In addition, we expect these trends that prompt corporate foundations and donors are good, socially democratic, public programs that would otherwise benefit millions of people.

In this report, we share insights from our research to identify barriers to solutions proposed by well-meaning organizations in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, primarily in the United States. We also consider the implications for change and strategies to foster change and characterizing economic alternatives. We foster that attention on these barriers, the role of philanthropy and nonprofits in addressing systemic issues about poverty and wealth, where we are doing well, and where we can do better.
3 TIPS FOR INCORPORATING INTENTIONAL DESIGN:

1. Involve your design team / designer from the beginning

2. Map your audience’s journey / engagement ecosystem

3. Leverage technology for flexible templates (e.g. Google Slides, Canva)
QUESTIONS + OBSERVATION
THANK YOU

brokeproject.org
WORKSHEETS NOW AVAILABLE
brokeproject.org
Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred, it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things.

ISABEL WILKERSON, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents
Media is the primary mechanism through which ideology is shared and learned.
Working people got $600 unemployment checks (many governors cut those off early to starve people who would not “go back to work.”)

Billionaires’ wealth increased by $3.9B between March 18 and December 30, 2020.
Anti-poverty organizations in the impact sector share a narrative that frames ending poverty as successfully integrating poor people into the existing capitalist system.

Success is defined by a person or community's ability to successfully “work” their way out of poverty.
Organizations share partial stories about poor people, only sharing aspects of their lives related to being poor or getting out of poverty. Stories about people in other countries over simplify [AC or glorify] poverty by featuring people in pastoral settings.

Organizations share stories of individuals who were able to become contributing members of a capitalist society by joining the middle class or starting businesses.

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The stories told promote individual-level change over system-level change, even when the organization acknowledges systemic changes are needed.

Organizations do not share stories about wealth.
If we call on activists, nonprofits, charities, donors and funders to tell just, accurate stories about poverty and wealth, we can weaken the harmful narratives that hold in place our current economic, social, and political systems, in order to end poverty and create a world where everyone’s needs are met, and where new stories are grounded in truth, liberation, and empathy.
The story we’re told about WHY people can’t “move up” in class status is characterized in a way that blames and shames the poor for being poor – because by placing the blame on individual poor people, the network of oppressive economic infrastructure that keeps the rich rich remains safe.
Out of deep conditions of domination and exclusion, people create their own insights, understandings, knowledge, and narratives.