



# CONVENING REPORT

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MacArthur  
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**The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI)**, based at American University's School of Communication, is a creative innovation lab and research center that creates, studies, and showcases media for equity, social change, and social justice. Focusing on independent, documentary, and entertainment media, the Center bridges boundaries between scholars, producers and communication practitioners across media industries, social justice, public policy, and public engagement. The Center produces resources for the field and academic research; creates original media; convenes conferences and events; and works collaboratively to understand and design media that matter.

This report was authored by a CMSI team comprising of Kimberly Reason, David Conrad-Perez and Caty Borum and produced with the support of Varsha Ramani.

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Erika Soto Lamb, VP Social Impact Strategy, Comedy Central and MTV Entertainment Group, addressing the audience.

# INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, we have lived through an unprecedented convergence of once-in-a-lifetime events, from a global pandemic to historic racial justice uprisings. Simultaneously, while challenges to equity and justice continue, hopeful stories have emerged from social movements, entertainment media, activists, filmmakers, comedians, and storytellers of all kinds. In every juncture of strife and social progress, we need narratives to help point out injustice, but we also need them to provide sources of joy, hope, and optimism to build a better future.

At such a moment, what role does storytelling and cultural narrative play in bridging the chasmic fissures on inequality and guiding future attention and social change to address them? What new media tools and innovations do we need to pioneer and leverage in order to not only construct new and more accurate narratives, but to control and reshape existing ones? How do we use intimate storytelling across traditional and emerging platforms to reach, elevate and galvanize communities for social change? What stories can provide a sense of efficacy and hope and community—building up rather than tearing down?

At the [Center for Media & Social Impact \(CMSI\)](#), we believe that the power of intimate storytelling—across genres and media platforms—lies at the core of successful efforts to expand equity and create a more just world, given the profound role of narrative in creating empathy and human connection, and even spurring action. We believe in stories that challenge and counter damaging negative portrayals of people and ideas, and the individual artists and thinkers who create and share them with the world. And we believe in civic practice—that is, the physical and online work of organizing and encouraging public engagement with an eye toward social progress—that takes place alongside these stories.

We also believe that the many examples of this work, created collaboratively by many different types of makers, thinkers, strategists and thought-leaders, should be curated, catalogued, analyzed, synthesized and shared with those who aspire to understand story-led social change.

In this spirit, *Story Movements* was launched in 2016 to bring together some of the industry's leading storytellers to deeply examine emerging ideas that get at the heart of unearthing stories for creating social change. Every two years, CMSI gathers a group of media makers across a broad continuum of talent to share their culture work, storytelling best practices, outreach strategies, and media technologies. In the act of coming together for two days, filmmakers, movement communicators, comedians and journalists generate new ideas for using evocative storytelling to inspire deep conversations in our communities and propel social and cultural change.

This report provides highlights from the 2021 *Story Movements* convening.

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You have to not only understand your audiences and where your people are to be effective communicators, but you also have to think critically about the things that make them feel whole. What are the things that we access daily that make us feel as human as possible — **the art, the music, the fashion, the political cartoons** — all across the spectrum of creative content.

— **CHELSEA FULLER,**  
**COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA**  
**STRATEGIST, MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES**

”



# WHAT IS STORY MOVEMENTS?

**Story Movements** is a biennial CMSI convening of entertainment, media and social justice storytellers that curates dialogue and community building, presents research and explores case studies about the role of civic media storytelling and community-centered narrative in contemporary movements for social change. From documentary filmmaking and investigative journalism to storytelling activism and entertainment, **Story Movements** examines and captures the current and future-looking moment in story-led demands for social change.

**Through talks, panels and open discussions, the convening looks through the lens of contemporary themes of social inequality and injustice to ask and answer:**

- **What works?**
- **How can genres of civic, justice-oriented storytelling work with one another?**

The convening responds to the vitality of the moment in civic media platforms and stories, as well as the urgency of inequality and social justice, and the imperative for optimism in creating narrative-driven change.

“We’ve been living through a dark moment over these past few years,” said Caty Borum Chattoo, executive director of CMSI, at the opening of the convening. “And yet, on the other side of dark, we see incredible light. We want to invite you to be in a space of light and optimism. It is a choice, a daily choice you make to be in light and to practice in light and to find other people inspired by this same belief. That is how it works. This is how social change happens.”

The convening hosted a wide spectrum of social justice-oriented media makers who leverage the power of media authentic content to shift culture, shape policy and hold power to account: documentary filmmakers, media innovators, comedians, strategic communication practitioners, community organizers, researchers, and journalists.

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We’ve been living through a dark moment over these past few years. **And yet, on the other side of dark, we see incredible light.**

— **CATY BORUM,**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CMSI**

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"At the end of the day, our problems are really about false and misleading narratives," said Jennifer Humke, senior program officer at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which funds **Story Movements**. "Stories that we've been telling ourselves and handing down from generation to generation that are not true and that power a lot of inequities in society. At **Story Movements**, there is great power in the room to change it. We very much view CMSI as a center of gravity for this evolving and growing universe of civic media and civic media-makers."

The convening included two days of individual presentations and panel discussions from leading makers and experts working on the front lines of recent social movement and change efforts in communities across the country. And comedy played a central role in shaping the tone and flow of the convening, with comedian Gabe González emceeding the event.

"Research shows that people listen better with comedy," said González. "We encouraged attendees to play and feel optimistic in part because there were comedians in the room, and to be inspired by the people they were going to hear from."

Throughout the convening, stand-up comedians performed justice-centered comedy, interweaving formal presentations with personal origin stories that inform their work.



Gabe Gonzalez, Comedian, Writer and Convening MC engaging the attendees.



Jennifer Humke, Senior Program Officer, MacArthur Foundation, addressing the audience.



Cathy Borum, Executive Director, CMSI welcoming the gathering.



# EMERGENT THEMES

Over the two-day convening, key speakers and active participants drove conversations toward several interesting themes, all related to leveraging narrative for social change. These included:

## → INSPIRING A BASE OF SUPPORTERS

Several presenters and attendees coalesced around the idea of being clear about knowing your audience and building storylines that speak directly to this audience. When under-represented communities see themselves in films and television shows, they often experience profound shifts in awareness that inspire them to action. As one speaker put it, “preaching to the choir” doesn’t mean excluding other groups, but rather, it’s an act of inclusion. It can mean telling a long-ignored audience: “I see you.” In showing and celebrating a historically marginalized and misrepresented community, films and TV shows inspire audiences to action. Similarly, other speakers shared the importance of not taking allies for granted. Too often, one speaker said, social change strategies can focus on trying to convert those on the other side, rather than seeking to build stronger partnerships and coalitions within your community or those in the middle (or on the fence).

## → AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING TOUCHES HEARTS AND MINDS

Presenters discussed bridging cultural divides by creating and producing authentic storytelling that touches hearts and minds. Examples of authentic narratives included looking for unique stories that no one else is telling, using writers and actors from communities to tell that community’s story, and leveraging influencers and other cultural assets to amplify stories and messages.

## → REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN FILM AND TELEVISION

Many studies have painted a clear picture of the specific ways in which communities of Black, Brown, Indigenous and people from other communities—including the disability community—have been vilified, absent or under-represented in feature films and entertainment

television. Studies show how these films perpetuate derogatory narratives and harmful tropes that permeate social, political and cultural institutions. Storytellers play a powerful role in sunsetting these tropes and portraying misrepresented characters in an authentic, nuanced light.

## → BUILD A PIPELINE OF REPRESENTATIVE CREATIVES

When it comes to the entertainment marketplace, decisions are made behind the camera. Research findings can also be used to identify talent holes in the creative pipeline and develop opportunities for building a bench of cross-industry talent—assistants, camera operators, scriptwriters, producers, directors and showrunners—who represent marginalized communities and are ready to work on day one. Presenters showcased examples of artist fellowships and a database of creatives from under-represented communities.

## → YOUNG PEOPLE AREN’T THE FUTURE—THEY ARE NOW

Gen Z viewers represent the next generation of entertainment audiences who are transforming media platforms in real time. While Baby Boomers and Gen Xers continue watching TV, Millennials and Gen Z viewers stream entertainment and media over YouTube and TikTok. They also leverage collective social media savvy to wage well-executed boycott and other justice campaigns online, effectively bringing the opposition to heel. Media makers need to pay more attention to this group and include their preferred media channels and content into storytelling strategies.



# THE SESSIONS



EMCEE

## **Gabe González, Host and Producer, *The Lavender Scare***

Gabe González is Puerto Rican comedy writer and actor from Brooklyn, New York. He was featured in *Brooklyn Magazine's* '30 Under 30' in 2017 and in *Time Out New York's* 'Comedians of Color You Should Know' in 2018. His pilot *Los Blancos* was a winner at *Yes ... And Laughter Lab* in 2019.

## **SESSION ONE: LEVERAGING CULTURE AND STORYTELLING TO CREATE SPACES FOR HUMAN CONNECTION**

The participants in this session, a cross-section of filmmakers, labor organizers, community organizers and comedians, explored the importance of using storytelling and cultural ties to move beyond ideological binaries of "red and blue" regions of the country in order to connect.

## **Independent Filmmaker, Director, *Always in Season* Jacqueline Olive**

Jacqueline Olive, an independent filmmaker and recipient of the 2019 Sundance Festival Special Jury Prize for Moral Urgency for her film, *Always in Season*, spoke about the importance of storytellers in being specific and clear about identifying their audiences. "You want to preach to the choir so you are activating the folk who are already resonant and not leaving your primary audience behind," said Olive. For *Always in Season*, "we took time crafting each scene and were very intentional about when we were speaking to our primary and secondary audiences." Olive spent ten years researching her project in communities doing racial justice and conciliation work around the country. She is using recent research by CMSI to demonstrate the power and authenticity of documentary films in engaging audiences in deep conversations on complex issues like racial terrorism and racial violence.

## **Appalachian Media Institute Willa Johnson**

Willa Johnson, Director of the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI) and co-founder of the Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project (STAY), spoke about the power of AMI's Appalshop youth photography and media program in breathing new life into creating authentic stories of Appalachia's diverse communities. The original idea for Appalshop, which has documented the experience of growing up in Appalachia for 33 years, was to train young people to use the camera. "What happened," said Johnson, "is that we trained people to use the camera within their own community as a way to lift up rather than demean rural communities for hardships these communities face." Johnson now leverages Appalshop as a community space to educate and convene people who might not buy into Appalshop's mission but turn up for its events to support local youth.







### Resilience Force Saket Soni

Saket Soni, Executive Director of Resilience Force and national voice of America's Resilience Workforce, has worked for 15 years at the intersection of climate, labor and migration in the post-Hurricane Katrina Gulf Coast. He spoke about the thousands of migrant workers from around the world who are rebuilding U.S. communities devastated by worsening storms along the Gulf Coast. Sleeping on streets and under cars, working in homes filled with toxic sludge and human remains, migrant workers place their own health and safety at risk performing essential recovery functions. "When I travel to hurricane-torn parts of the United States and take in the unbroken landscape of human suffering," said Soni. "I feel scared. But our job is to find those points of light — the resilience workers, health care workers, nurses, teachers — the people who are the basis of our resilience and without whom no recovery would be possible. Soni produced "#HereToBuild," a one-minute video featuring America's resilience workers that he hopes will help pave their path to citizenship.

### Jolt Initiative and Jolt Action Gloria Gonzáles-Dholakia

Gloria Gonzales-Dholakia, Executive Director of Jolt Initiative and Jolt Action, which aims to increase the civic participation of Latinos and young Latinos in Texas, spoke about bridging civic engagement with storytelling to win on issues that matter most to Latinos. Jolt's community organizing strategy centers around Latino culture, art and music in a way that honors *Latinidad*, or the whole Latino community. "Storytelling is about connection," said Gonzales-Dholakia. "When we share our stories, we are moving people with *corazón*. We connect by sharing our stories with heart — that's how we create movements." For instance, Jolt innovatively integrates the quinceañera, an annual rite of passage for teen girls in Latino communities, in their organizing work to bring together Latino youth and their families in a meaningful and culturally safe environment.



### Comedian, Host, Co-Author, *The Liberal Redneck Manifesto* Corey Ryan Forrester

Corey Ryan Forrester, a comedian, writer and show host, performs with the wellRED comedy tour, a trio of Southern comedians who co-authored a bestselling book, *The Liberal Redneck Manifesto: Draggin' Dixie Outta The Dark*. Forrester acknowledged that while racism is a huge problem in the South, he believes the South serves as a scapegoat for racism that is prevalent in every region in America. Forrester advocates that more attention be given to addressing mental health. "When you give mentally unstable people access to misinformation, what do you expect is going to happen? We've got to address mental health in this country if we want anything to get solved because some of these people are crying out for help." Forrester and his creative partners draw from their friendship to share their uniquely Southern perspective on society, culture, and politics.





Panel 1 (L to R) Corey Ryan Forrester, Jacqueline Olive (Director, *Always in Season*), Willa Johnson, Gloria Gonzales Dholakia and Saket Soni  
 Willa Johnson, Director, Appalachian Media Institute.  
 Corey Ryan Forrester, Comedian, Host, Co-Author *The Liberal Redneck Manifesto*  
 Gloria Gonzales Dholakia, Executive Director, Jolt Initiative and Jolt Action  
 Saket Soni, Executive Director, Resilience Force



## SESSION TWO: HARNESSING CREATIVITY, CULTURE, AND NARRATIVE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

This session engaged leaders within contemporary movements and efforts for social justice and equity in discussing how the role of cultural narratives and creative engagement is key—fact sheets and straight information won't do the job. Creatively engaging people with evocative narrative is the heart of present-day storytelling work that extends from physical communities to TV screens and social media platforms.

### Movement for Black Lives Chelsea Fuller

Chelsea Fuller, formerly Vice President for TIME'S UP's global communications strategy and deputy director of communications at Blackbird, spoke about the need for communication practitioners to think comprehensively about what each of our communities needs. "Communications is actually about giving people information to help change their material conditions, to help them make informed decisions," she said. "And we have to be creative in the ways that we do that and use multiple ways — different kinds of strategies and tactics, channels and platforms — to help change how people behave and show up in the world." Fuller believes storytellers must measure how messages are shifting political and cultural conditions. "We want to be able to use data and science to prove to people that this type of storytelling, rooted in this type of work, actually does change things for the better."



### Fair Count Rebecca DeHart

Rebecca DeHart, CEO of Fair Count, the census equity organization founded by Stacey Abrams in Georgia, spoke about the power of creatively centering voters in elections. "The summer of 2020 was about power," she said. "It was about speaking up, speaking out and demanding to be heard." DeHart noted that the narrative on fraud was loud, so previously marginalized voters got louder, prevailing through three recounts and a run-off for two U.S. Senate seats. In response to new challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, Fair Count expanded their community organizing strategies to include a direct-mail holiday card campaign that asked recipients to commit to voting in the Georgia Runoff Election. A social worker by training, DeHart is committed to developing innovative strategies and operationalizing big ideas for achieving equity in civic engagement efforts.



### ViacomCBS Social Impact Erika Soto Lamb

Erika Soto Lamb, Vice President for Social Impact at MTV and founding head of social impact strategy at Comedy Central, spoke about showrunners and storytellers leveraging cultural strategy, cultural narrative and cultural assets to reach people in new ways. Recounting the Sandy Hook tragedy, Soto Lamb said, "At the same time the National Rifle Association was holding a press conference to advocate for guns in schools, Everytown for Gun Safety dropped *Demand the Plan*, a Beyonce video that demanded an end to gun violence in America. Soto Lamb's group also used comedy and popular hosts such as a Trevor Noah to call attention to the absurdity of open carry gun policies. Soto Lamb now leads action campaigns for ViacomCBS brands VHI, Paramount Network, Smithsonian Channel and Pop, among others.





## New Moral Majority Rev. Ryan Eller

Rev. Ryan M. Eller, co-founder of the New Moral Majority and President of Beloved Community Foundation, an organization that bridges faith leaders across traditional divides of race and religion for the cause of racial justice, spoke about the need for a movement to tell America's whole story. "If your ancestors likely created and perpetuated systems of injustice," said Eller, "then you have a moral obligation to get off the sidelines." Everyone has a role in bearing the full burden of liberation. "The best storytellers are not in Hollywood or delivering your evening news. They're in the pulpits, the hills, the hollers, the barber shops in communities across America." As a pioneer in an emerging narrative-change space, Eller remains at the forefront of research on immigrant and rural America portrayals on television and in news media.



Panel 2 (L to R) Gabe Gonzalez, Chelsea Fuller, Rebecca DeHart, Erika Soto Lamb and Rev. Ryan Eller  
 Rev. Ryan Eller, Co-Founder, New Moral Majority; President, Beloved Community Foundation  
 Chelsea Fuller, Communications and Media Strategist, Movement for Black Lives  
 Rebecca DeHart, CEO, Fair Count  
 Erika Soto Lamb, VP Social Impact Strategy, Comedy Central and MTV Entertainment Group



## SESSION THREE: CHANGING THE CULTURAL MIRROR IN HOLLYWOOD

In this session, cultural organizers and media makers discussed their strategies for expanding positive portrayals of traditionally marginalized communities and correcting dehumanizing ones. Today, cultural and media activists use a broader creative toolbox that includes artistic collaboration and deeper talent integration into the Hollywood machine.



### GLAAD Alex Schmider

Alex Schmider, Associate Director of Transgender Representation for GLAAD, the nation's leading LGBTQ media advocacy organization, spoke about the importance of transgender representation in film to changing negative social, cultural and media narratives about trans people. Schmider also spoke about pipelining storytellers who are able to step into a writers' room or a producer's chair and get authentic trans stories out into the world. Calling out the disproportionately high rate of violence against trans people, and particularly trans people of color, Schmider said, "seventy percent of Americans don't believe they know someone who is trans. Meaning everything they know about trans people has come from defamatory, degrading, gross media misrepresentation of who we are." Schmider believes youth today are more comfortable expressing their queer identity because authentic, trans-centered films and TV shows like *Pose* are changing hearts and minds about the trans community.

### Pillars Fund Arij Mikati

Arij Mikati, Managing Director of Culture Change at Pillars Fund, spoke about absent and negative representations of Muslims in films. Highlighting study findings from *Missing and Maligned: The Reality of Muslims in Popular Global Movies*, Mikati noted that less than two percent of nearly 9,000 speaking characters in popular films between 2017 and 2019 were Muslim, despite Muslims representing 24 percent of the world's population. Nearly 40 percent of primary and secondary Muslim characters were portrayed as perpetrators of violence. Mikati discussed *The Pillars' Blue Print for Muslim Inclusion* and how The Pillars Fund is working to sunset terrorism tropes. "Our strategy focuses on transforming institutions and making macro change through a broad coalition of producers, agencies, festivals and philanthropists," Mikati said. These efforts include launching The Pillars Artist Fellowship and The Muslim Creative Database to integrate Muslim creative talent into the filmmaking pipeline.



### Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment Jess Ju

Jess Ju, Director of Programs and Operations at the Coalition for Asian Pacifics in Entertainment (CAPE), shared the need to champion a greater quantity and higher quality of Asian American and Pacific Islander representations on screen. Speaking to the increase in anti-Asian hate incidents, Ju discussed the effectiveness of the Harvard Alcohol Project's 1988 Designated Driver campaign in reducing alcohol-related traffic fatalities by integrating designated driver storylines into primetime television shows like *Cheers* and *L.A. Law*. "There's a 'Trojan horse' quality in entertainment," said Ju, "where we can educate when guards are down," Ju said. Ju trains new writers through the New Writers Fellowship program. She hopes to spur more authentic AAPI storytelling in the influential genre of animation.



## RespectAbility Lauren Appelbaum

Lauren Appelbaum, Vice President of Communications and Entertainment & News Media for the disability advancement nonprofit RespectAbility, spoke about the underrepresentation of 61 million disabled Americans in college, jobs and films, and the power to change societal and cultural attitudes about people with disabilities by disrupting the entertainment industry from the outside. "When you can see disabled people doing real things on screen — us having jobs, getting married, being in love," said Appelbaum, "all those things can really lead to systematic change in how everything is reflected in real life." Her work focuses on building a pipeline of disabled creatives behind the camera, and intentionally recruiting and training disabled people and entertainment and news executives to serve as staff and on boards.



## Comedian, TV Writer Joey Clift

Joey Clift, a comedian and TV writer named by Uproxx as one of "26 Native American Comedians To Follow in 2020," spoke about Native comedy in the U.S. and the growing representation of Native comedians on the comedy circuit. Recounting his journey as one of the rare stand-up Native comedians early in his career, Clift noted the dozens of Native comedy creatives now writing for TV shows, a representational shift that came about largely because Native show runners knew they had to look off the beaten path to find Native talent. Today, said Clift, "Native comedians who have been plying their talent off the mainstream circuit are killing it on the casino comedy scene." Clift encourages his allies to use their privilege, resources and connections to push through the pipeline more shows that authentically center Native characters and storylines.



Panel on "Changing the Cultural Mirror in Hollywood" (L to R) Gabe Gonzalez, Joey Clift, Lauren Appelbaum (VP, Communications and Entertainment & News Media, RespectAbility), Alex Schmitter (Award-Winning Film Producer and Associate Director, Transgender Representation at GLAAD), Jess Ju, Arij Mikati

Arij Mikati, Managing Director of Culture Change, Pillars Fund

Jess Ju, Director of Programs and Operations, CAPE

Joey Clift, Comedian, TV Writer



## SESSION FOUR: EXPANDING THE LENS IN THE FUTURE OF ENTERTAINMENT OF STORYTELLING

In this session, new media innovators, film makers, media executives and comedians explored the powerful creative energy emerging from an exciting class of storytellers working across platforms. Together, these storytellers are shifting old media and entertainment business models, from the formal TV format to digital and social platforms, expanding the lens of stories and lived experiences now available on small and big screens.

### Open Television

#### Aymar Jean "AJ" Christian

AJ Christian, associate professor of communication studies at Northwestern University and co-founder of OTV | Open Television, a research project and platform for intersectional television, spoke about Open Television offering independent distribution as countervailing force against the rise in global corporate power, and using intersectional TV storytelling to overcome deep inequalities and build community. A key question his work strives to answer is how representation can be cultivated in the development, production, distribution, exhibition and research of storytelling. "We can't just focus on storytelling," said Christian. "We can't just focus on production. We have to focus on every single aspect of the industry. And if it's not in the industry, we have to build it ourselves." Christian leverages OTV Studio as an incubator for intersectional film and television, where he develops artists to produce short-form content while accelerating long-form story development.



### Kinetic Energy Entertainment

#### Diana Williams

Diana Williams, CEO and co-founder of Kinetic Energy Entertainment and formerly Creative Development and Franchise Producer at Lucasfilm, spoke about the inertia of an entertainment industry seeking to maintain old ways of doing business in the face of transformative change. "If we do not doubt the default," Williams said, "we will continue to perpetuate the problems that have been happening in this industry." The good news is that the entertainment industry is not only seeing changes and movements, but also new faces and talent behind the camera. Committed to widening the lens of story with universal themes told across a variety of media, Williams remains at the forefront of working with emerging and established talent to include all voices in entertainment media.

### NPR

#### Eric Deggans

Eric Deggans, TV critic for National Public Radio (NPR), spoke about the complaints against the so-called "cancel culture," which he alternatively views as "Consequence Culture"—traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups taking control of their own narrative in ways that the world cannot ignore. New TV shows and films center around people of color today not only focus on social justice, but they also win awards, earn viewers and make money. "It's an awesome thing to behold," said Deggans. "Authentic shows come from giving talented creators of color opportunity to make their own shows, and along the way, helps the entertainment industry make better products and more money." In a partnership between Craigslist founder Craig Newmark and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, Deggans joined a prestigious group of contributors to the ethics book: *The New Ethics of Journalism* published by Sage/CQ Press.





## Unleashing Giants Studios Emil Pinnock

Emil Pinnock, an American film director, producer, writer, and actor whose credits include *Gridiron Gang* starring Dwayne Johnson and NBC's series *E-Ring*, spoke about his personal experiences as child born to a 14-year-old single mother in Harlem, his brush with long-term incarceration, and his fluke path as an independent actor and producer. Believing that storytelling serves as major medium in shaping and changing culture, Pinnock urged his audience to invest in unique voices to expand the lens of storytelling. "Are you willing to go into Compton and Africa to find those voices?" said Pinnock. "Finding geniuses in the pockets of America should be the norm — if we dare to go there." Unleashing Giants Studios has been tapped to write the original stories for The Negro Baseball League and legendary lyricist Biggie Smalls, which are all currently in development.

## Comedian, Writer, Actress Joyelle Nicole Johnson

Joyelle Nicole Johnson, a comedian, writer and actress who has performed on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* and toured with *Daily Show* co-creator Lizz Winstead's Abortion Access Front, spoke about using her voice as a Black woman and an advocate for reproductive rights. She brings her abortion experience to the stage to help other women face the stigma of abortion while going up against a "boy's club" comedy culture. "I know that using my voice comes with backlash," said Johnson. "But we're turning the tanker. When it comes to changing these moments, it starts with vocal dissent."



Panel on "The Future of Entertainment Storytelling" (L to R), Joyelle Nicole Johnson (Comedian, Writer, Actress), Eric Deggans, Emil Pinnock (Director, Producer, Writer, Unleashing Giants Studios), Diana Williams (Kinetic Energy Entertainment), AJ Christian.

Eric Deggans, TV Critic, NPR

AJ Christian, Associate Professor of Communication Studies, Northwestern University





# THE SPEAKERS



**Lauren Appelbaum**  
RespectAbility



**Aymar Jean "AJ" Christian**  
Open Television



**Joey Clift**  
Comedian, TV  
Writer



**Rebecca DeHart**  
Fair Count



**Eric Deggans**  
NPR



**Rev. Ryan Eller**  
New Moral Majority



**Chelsea Fuller**  
Movement for Black  
Lives



**Corey Ryan  
Forrester**  
Comedian, Host, Co-  
Author, *The Liberal  
Redneck Manifesto*



**Gloria Gonzáles-  
Dholakia**  
Jolt Initiative and  
Jolt Action



**Gabe González**  
Host and Producer,  
*The Lavender Scare*



**Joyelle Nicole  
Johnson**  
Comedian, Writer,  
Actress



**Willa Johnson**  
Appalachian Media  
Institute



**Jess Ju**  
Coalition of  
Asian Pacifics in  
Entertainment



**Erika Soto Lamb**  
ViacomCBS Social  
Impact



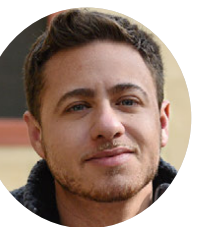
**Arij Mikati**  
Pillars Fund



**Jacqueline Olive**  
Independent Filmmaker,  
Director, *Always in Season*



**Emil Pinnock**  
Unleashing Giants  
Studios



**Alex Schmider**  
GLAAD



**Saket Soni**  
Resilience Force



**Diana Williams**  
Kinetic Energy  
Entertainment



# ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

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It's my second time at *Story Movements* and it's a really important time for me to come. Thankfully, we've been doing a lot of television and film work with a subject matter that is hoping to make a difference in the world. One thing that stuck with me was AppalShop and the space they have to do performances that creates an opportunity for conversation in that environment. It got me thinking about the importance of film festivals — not so much to see the film, but to be in the space and then have a discussion about the film.

— ERIC JOHNSON, TRAILBLAZER STUDIOS

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I work as an independent communications consultant with various nonprofits and foundations on social change campaigns. I felt like that was a lot to learn from a nicely curated group of people who had similar interests and experiences but came from different areas of disciplines in a space where you're looking at the intersection of media, long-form and short-form.

— YASMIN HAMIDI, COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIST

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“

Chelsea Fuller with Movement for Black Lives was brilliant because I feel like she took us out of the moment and gave us this longer-term perspective that was really empowering. I also live in the Deep South and the storms and natural disasters that affect democracy and the work we do, and didn't know about Resilience Force and the labor organizing with undocumented people. It just sort of catapulted for me. Also, I loved the comedy. It can be heavy to sit in rooms and listen to big ideas during hard times — the pandemic and the uprising and the election. You can get really heavy thinking about that. So to have it broken up with comedy was brilliant.

— **REBECCA DEHART, CEO, FAIR COUNT**

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I spent the entire pandemic making a documentary with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on cybercrimes and sextortion against children, which is the fast growing crime in the world. We came across Caty Borum's book on using storytelling and documentaries for social change. I really connected with her statement today about stepping into the light, and you can choose how you spend your time. And spending time in the light and producing in the light is what I chose to do with my pandemic time.

— **MARIA PECO, DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER, PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR**

”



Emil Pinnock, Unleashing Giants Studios



“

Something that really stuck with me was preaching to the choir. In peace and conflict resolution, there's always a lot of talk about how you want to be in conflict to get people to a place where they can bond with each other. But sometimes you need to escalate conflict towards justice. Sometimes you need to be really clear about something that's going on, something that isn't right, and build a movement to effect change. And in those cases, yes, you do need to reach the buyer because you need to make sure your base feels strong enough and trusts each other enough to move towards that common goal.

— **AUBREY WILLIAMS, DOCTORAL STUDENT,  
CARTER SCHOOL FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT  
RESOLUTION**

”



Lauren Appelbaum, RespectAbility



“

I work with a lot of organizations and my counsel for clients has been related more to writing for social media, more of those traditional and creative tactics. But I was really interested in being more inspired on how to use entertainment and pop culture storytelling.

— **HANNAH ROSS, COMMUNICATIONS  
CONSULTANT**

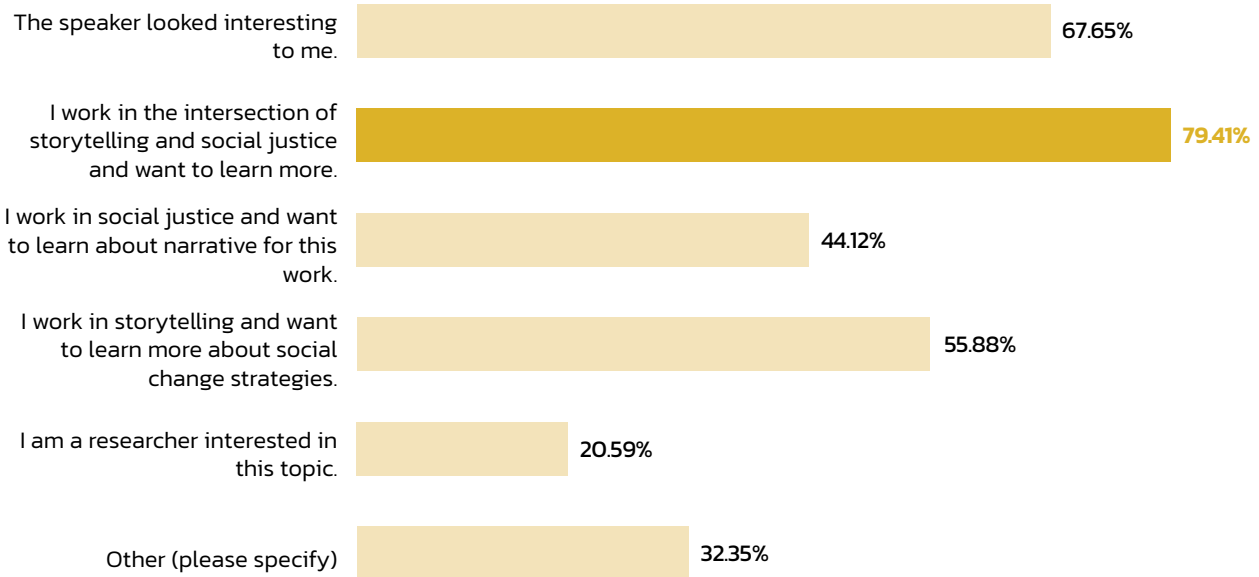
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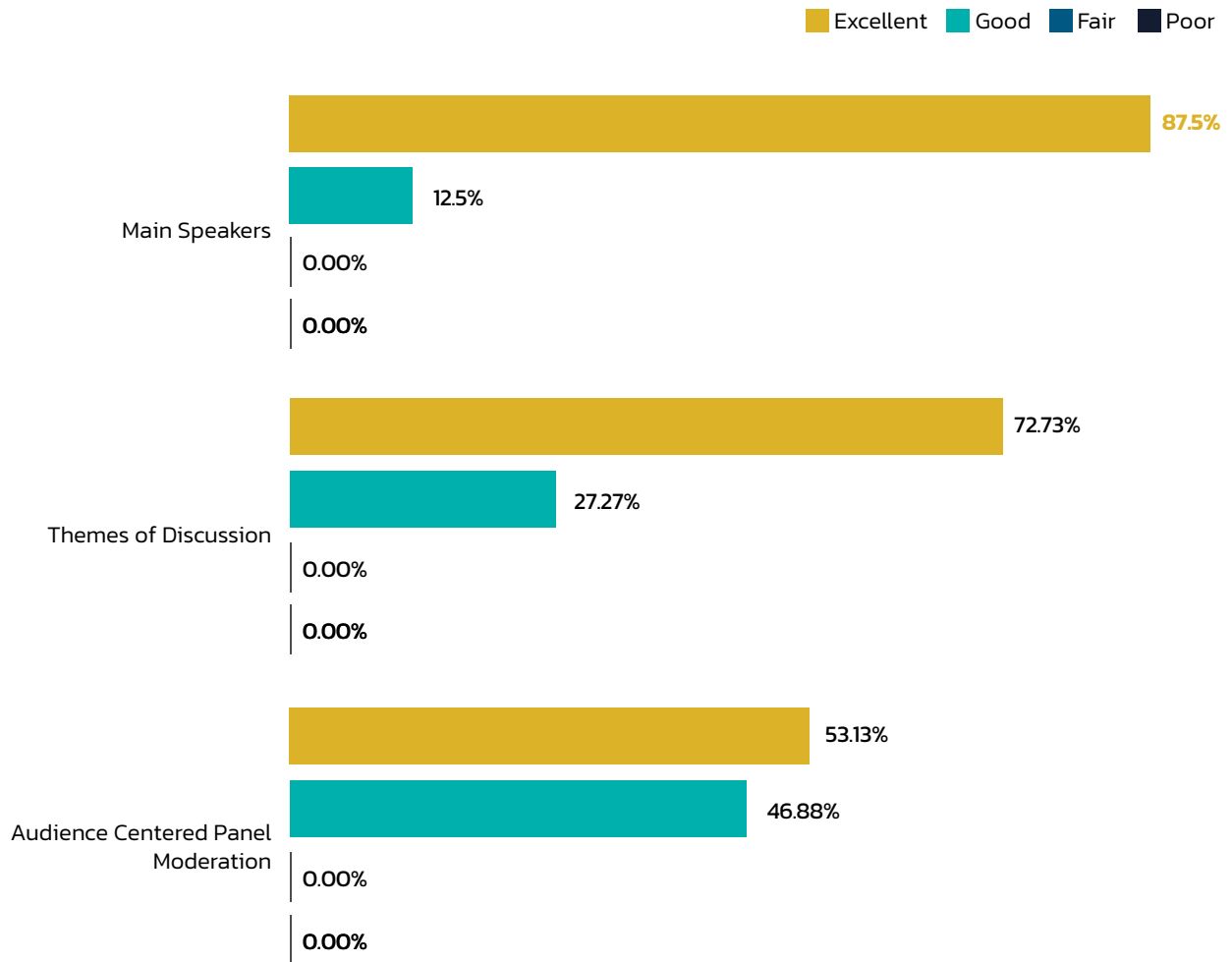
# SURVEY FEEDBACK

## What were your main reasons for attending *Story Movements*?

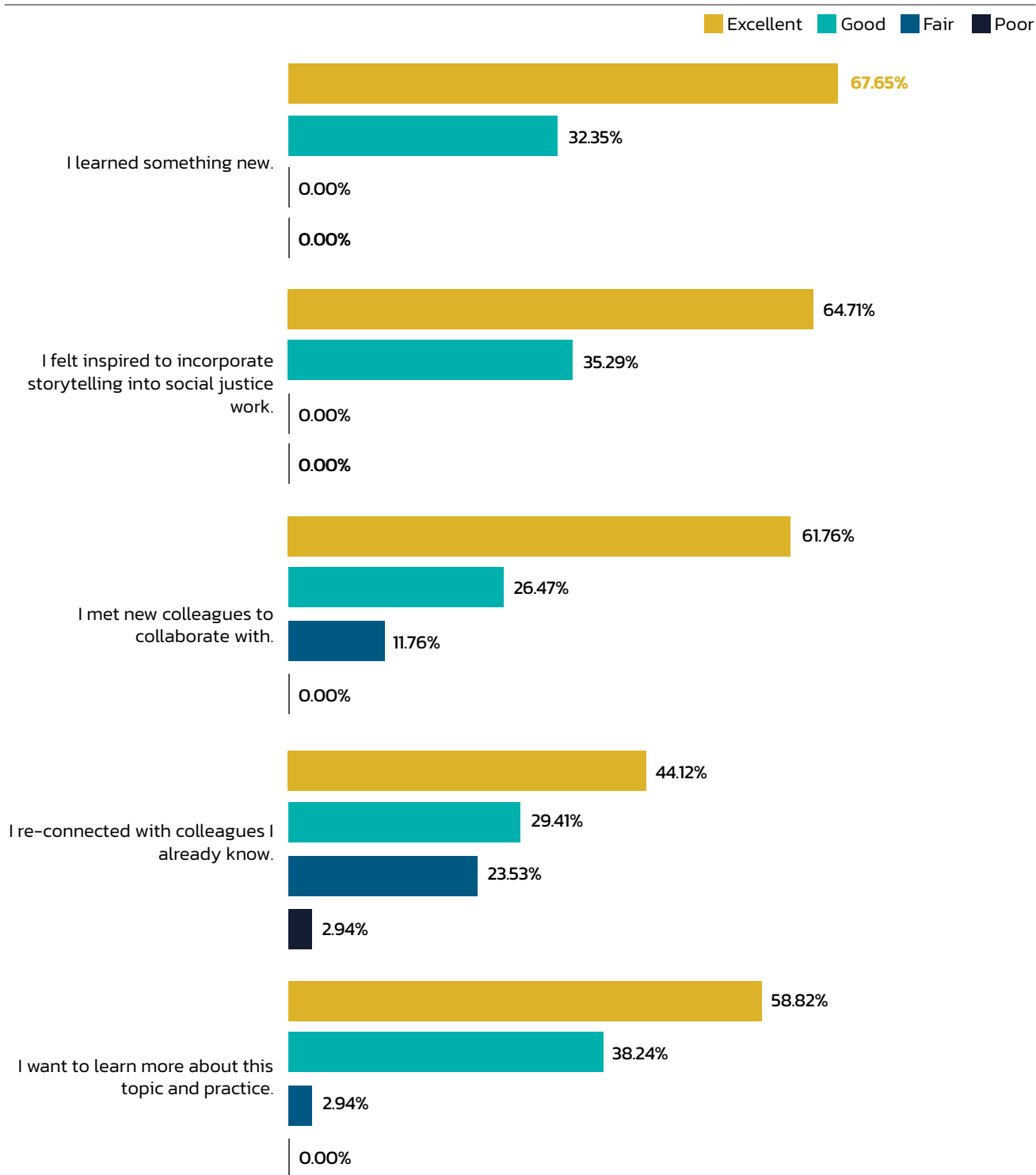
Choose the top 3



Please assess the quality of each component of *Story Movements*.

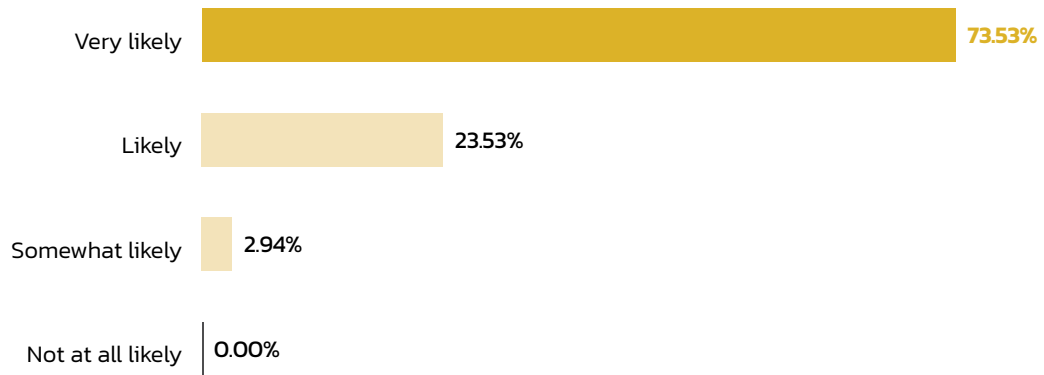


### How much do you agree or disagree with each statement as a response to attending *Story Movements*?



## How likely are you to recommend *Story Movements* to a friend or colleague?

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# QUOTES FROM THE ANONYMOUS FEEDBACK SURVEY

"The speakers and panelists were dynamite. Each brought her/his/their unique perspective, experiences, and social justice/narrative work to the collective conversation. I learned a whole lot about who's doing what and where. I'm eager to learn more about each of these narrative leaders and plan to follow them on Twitter and elsewhere. What they all had to say was so powerful, riveting and enlivening that I look forward to watching the livestream again via recordings. Superb job pulling together a top-shelf, passionate group in a flawlessly organized convening from soup to nuts!"

— **Communications Professional**  
(attended virtually)

"I wish there was more diversity in the panelist's backgrounds but thought that they all were wonderful and insightful!"

— **Philanthropy Professional**  
(attended in person)

"What a brilliant convening of minds for substantive discussion and questioning. Look forward to attending again!"

— **Filmmaker/Nonprofit professional**  
(attended in person)

"I really appreciate the thought that went into bringing in such a rich diversity of perspectives from speakers. It meant a lot to see a really ethnically diverse lineup representing different racial, religious, geographic and other often underrepresented groups."

— **Communications Professional**  
(attended in person)

"*Story Movements* is unique in that it allows speakers and participants to be in proximity to one another and was able to nurture opportunities for connection and ideas for collaboration. The mix of comedy, storytelling, and social movements allowed for depth but not despair."

— **Philanthropy Professional**  
(attended in person)



"I was re-inspired in listening to these speakers. Thank you for this soul-food. I'm ready to get back in the trenches!!"

— **Professor (attended in person)**

"Important to hear voices across different generations. Refreshing to learn about success stories and current strategies as a Canadian who watches CNN regularly at night, and feels deep despair about so much hate and threats to democracy, which Canada experiences too, in more insidious institutional ways than in the USA. I appreciated the expressions of love and good humor, and emphasis on the timeless transformative value of storytelling. Bless you all for demonstrating this fact."

— **Filmmaker/Professor (attended virtually)**

"I enjoyed both *Story Movements* that I attended. It feels intimate and the themes, speakers and attendees tend to have common goals and values, which makes networking and listening all the more valuable. I love hearing from speakers who work in different communities and who approach this work in their own unique ways. Planet Word was an awesome setting. Thank you!"

— **Communications Professional (attended in person)**

"I think just hearing the diverse voices in the room was most helpful."

— **Filmmaker/Artist (attended in person)**

"There was a lot of soul in the conference. While it wasn't a workshop, the way it was facilitated and organized made it feel like a community was being built. The breadth and scope of subjects and experiences represented by the speakers truly helped provide a dynamic representation of what the intersection of storytelling and social justice looks like. I came away having learned new lessons about what it looks like to work in this space (especially useful since I am at the start of my own journey building a career in this area). I also came away feeling heartened to know that there is a whole community that comes together around this intersection. I feel energized to continue down this path because it now feels far more concrete to me. I also really, really appreciated how much gratitude was shown all throughout the event to those who had done the hard work of organizing it. As someone who has helped organize events like this before, I feel like it says a lot when the "behind the scenes" organizers (e.g., the people who aren't the emcees or speakers) are recognized explicitly and repeatedly. I've been in far too many settings where credit is not appropriately shared, and I feel like that can say a lot about the convening organizations. I had not heard of CMSI before this event, but I came away feeling very warm towards the Center precisely because it felt like a community that builds each other up. And to that point, thank you to everyone at CMSI for all of the work you did to make this happen in very difficult circumstances!"

— **Student/Communications Professional (attended in person)**





**CREDITS:** Report Author: Kimberly Reason; Report Editors: David Conrad Perez, Caty Borum, Varsha Ramani; Graphic Design: Orange Static; Web Design: Nick Ray; Photographs: Amir Hamja; Conference Producers: Varsha Ramani, Caty Borum





**STORY**  
**MOVEMENTS**

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