

RACE CLASS

NARRATIVE ACTION

ELECTION UPDATE - NOVEMBER 2020



A HISTORIC YEAR: SETTING THE STAGE FOR HOLISTIC PROGRESS



This year has redefined what it means to reckon with our past, advocate for better in our present, and expand the possibilities for our future. From the COVID-19 pandemic to mass protests in defense of Black lives, 2020 upended and transformed our realities, both exposing the injustices that the powerful few have unleashed for centuries and opening up the possibility for an overdue realignment of American politics.

And now, as another tense election closes with the narrow defeat of Donald Trump and a still divided Congress, we are reminded that the inequality and racial animosity certain politicians have used to distract and divide us since our nation's founding will not dissipate on its own.

In this context, Race Class Narrative Action (RCNA) knew that to forge a pathway to progress, we'd need to do things differently. We would have to begin healing the wounds of division in order to set the foundation for a multi-state, multi-racial coalition that could both win elections and push for a progressive governing agenda at the local, state and national level.

So that became our charge. By coming together to rewrite the rules and create a shared vision for the future, RCNA is weaving together a national movement to win progress on racial justice, voting rights, climate solutions, health care for all, robust and equitable public education, paid time to care and more. Because we know that across age, race, faith, language and geography - together, we make the future.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

For decades, the conservative movement has leaned on race-baiting and fear mongering to suppress the potential of the “New American Majority,” weaponizing wedge politics to cleave our communities across racial lines — dynamics we saw on full display in the 2020 election. In response, all too often, progressives opt to keep issues of racial justice and economic empowerment separate, or to remain silent about the former at the risk of alienating the mythical middle we’re told we must appease.

Instead of running away from addressing racism and sexism, the Race Class Narrative provides a necessary offense against dog-whistle politics, energizing our core base while inoculating and engaging persuadable voters. It acts as a rejoinder to the opposition’s division and fear, combatting the cynicism and despair that undermine sustained participation and collective action. Indeed, our approach is to engage the base in order to persuade the middle, while paying no mind to the intractable opposition.

Building off of the successes of 2018, state-based organizing and movement partners, SEIU, ASO Communications and others came together to advance a race forward, economic populist narrative and organizing strategy in several critical states — states that handed Donald Trump his victory in 2016 and became the key terrain for the right’s dog-whistle politics in 2020, including Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

WHY STATE-BASED MOVEMENT PARTNERS?

- Majority white states with a long history of de-industrialization, large non-college educated white populations and growing racial, cultural and religious diversity made our partner regions ripe for Trumpism in 2016 and beyond;
- Many of our states have been central to the fight for the Presidency, U.S. Senate, and state legislative control ahead of redistricting;
- Our partners provide strong and growing independent, multi-racial, state-based movement infrastructure — across c3, c4 and labor organizations;
- In 2018 we learned that state-based organizing, political and movement infrastructure can align to become an effective “choir,” delivering our message to move our base and persuade the middle;
- Any strategic narrative, communications and digital plan is most effective when anchored in real-world constituencies who are trained and equipped to put out and amplify an approach and storyline; and
- A political strategy is most powerful when it builds the long-term and sustained capacity of organizations and movements on the ground, enabling them to advance their power and agenda between election cycles.



2020 BY THE NUMBERS

Across the country, RCNA has provided our state partners with the tools they need to re-envision our democracy and build a shared, affirmative vision for our future. **Here are some highlights from Race Class Narrative Action's year:**

- **7** Race Class Narrative state brands developed across Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin
- More than **22,400** volunteers, staff, elected officials and political candidates trained in Race Class Narrative messaging in our target states and across the country
- More than **722,000** voters texted with RCN messages
- More than **2,082,900** voters reached by phone with RCN scripts across key states
- More than **\$3,600,000** spent on digital using innovative Race Class Narrative ad creative
- More than **198,677,015** impressions across the digital ad space, mobilizing voters in several battleground states
- Increased mobilization among voters served RCNA ads in the critical states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota — notably among suburban moms and voters of color in WI; low-turnout Black and Latinx voters in PA; and voters under 40 in MN

RCNA IS BORN: BUILDING RESEARCH-DRIVEN STATE MOVEMENTS

In a year where the right has attempted to sow division through racially-charged narratives like “law and order,” spread chaos with false claims of voter fraud, politicize masks and stereotype the suburbs, RCNA has served as a conduit for leaders and organizers to quickly mobilize across states, inoculate against attacks and misinformation, and share best practices and innovative interventions.

RCNA provided all of our state partners with high-quality, state-specific narrative and messaging research to inform their strategies. And we continued to refine our shared narrative with ongoing research throughout the year. With regular bi-monthly virtual meetups, a Slack channel with over 150 active partners, and frequent research briefings, we built community and kept states readied with cutting edge messaging insights on everything from the COVID-19 pandemic to policing and protests.

After working closely with movement organizations across our key states to onboard and align partners for over six months in 2019, we kicked off 2020 with an in-person convening in Chicago in partnership with SEIU. The purpose was to hold a space to foster relationships and narrative alignment among the cohort of RCN implementers across the Midwest. Throughout the two days together, we worked to define and clarify the connections between narrative, strategic communications, organizing, and campaigns, and strategize how to best position and collaborate among organizations in the progressive ecosystem using the latest round of RCN research to launch state branded campaigns.

Just two weeks after the in-person convening, we began our RCNA research briefing tour across the Midwest, with national events in Washington, D.C. and New York City (moved remotely in mid-March) to highlight each state’s key findings and most effective messages. Each state had anywhere between 50-125+ key stakeholders across labor, faith, philanthropy, advocacy and organizing in attendance. The briefings served as the jumping off point in cultivating a new center of gravity around our shared theory of change. From there, we went into full implementation mode, providing hands on support to leaders across our state networks, from rapid response messaging guidance to building digital capacity to coordinating messaging for mobilizations at key political inflection points, rooted in each state’s research findings.

Our small but mighty RCNA team trained more than 2,000 state and organizational leaders to be RCN messengers over the course of the year, including an intense three-part train the trainer series with 23 state leaders. Participants dug deeper into the theory behind the Race Class Narrative, had an assigned coach to work through the opportunities and challenges of putting the messaging into practice and worked on a group project to use the RCN framework across an organizing and strategic communications strategy.

These trained leaders left equipped to bring the RCN framework back to their own organizing and communication efforts, and received ongoing support from their coaches through election season.



MICHIGAN: THE PEOPLE'S TELETHON

In early spring, as Michigan emerged as a battleground for divisive attacks from the right, our partners set out to demand a safe and just response to the pandemic. The same day that armed militias stormed the Michigan state house with messages of hate, a multi-racial and cross-geographic coalition of RCNA partners held an eight-hour People's Telethon with live music, knitting lessons, cooking demonstrations, political education, and calls to action. More than 21,000 people tuned in, and special guests included Kerry Washington, Naomi Klein, and Abdul El-Sayed.



WISCONSIN: JUSTICE FOR JACOB BLAKE

When Trump flew out to a grieving Kenosha to sow fear and division after the police shooting of Jacob Blake, Jacob's family and organizers came together to show what Kenosha is really about. RCNA partners went to work to uplift and amplify the joyful celebration filled with music, barbecue, free haircuts, dancing and voter registration. Organizers held an Instagram Live with Kenosha native Mark Ruffalo, and the day was covered in the New York Times.



MINNESOTA: SUBURBAN MOMS RISE UP

After the murder of George Floyd, Minnesotans flooded the streets in protests that spread across the globe. When State Senator Paul Gazelka tried to sow division, claiming suburban moms were “scared to death” by protests, our partners sprung to action. Moms across the state called out his dog whistle, getting #IAmASuburbanMom to trend on Twitter and demanding that their elected officials defend Black lives. Faith in Minnesota started a petition and Facebook group to keep moms engaged and used digital advertising to amplify the true voices of moms in the state.



INDIANA: WINNING POLICE OVERSIGHT

Off the heels of nationwide protests in defense of Black lives - and in a deeply conservative state - some of RCNA's state partners across unions and faith-based organizations helped to secure a major victory for racial justice, organizing to establish civilian oversight over the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department. Their win was one step towards making Indianapolis a place where everyone has their rights and their lives respected.



We also laid the groundwork for new Race Class Narrative working groups in climate and racial justice, led by our trained state partner leaders, artists and organizers.

RCNA's Black Popular Front grew membership across Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio, designing and coming together under their own brand, Deliver Black Dreams. The group developed resources to mobilize Black voters rooted in the Race Class Narrative, including a [messaging guide, posters, social graphics and a four-part video series](#).

Our climate working group collaborated on building a shared language for climate justice rooted in a multi-racial, multi-issue movement. They partnered with artists across the Midwest to create a series of Race Class Narrative [videos](#) and designed [collateral](#), from mailers to social media content.

AN EARLY WIN IN THE MISSOURI PRIMARY

Following their state primary on August 4, in a major victory for Missouri families, 230,000 Missourians will soon receive healthcare through the expansion of Medicaid. Despite monied opposition wielding racialized wedge strategies and navigating a primary in a pandemic, grassroots organizing infrastructure — including our Race Class Narrative Action state partners — soundly passed Amendment 2 to expand Medicaid with 53.3% of Missouri voters supporting the measure. Our partners drove a race-forward narrative in all of their scripts and grassroots communications, and were able to embed the Race Class Narrative into the campaign's base voter materials. The Medicaid expansion victory, coupled with historic wins by candidates like Cori Bush and Kim Gardner, demonstrate game-changing shifts in Missouri, rooted in a growing political movement that has the power to tip the state's notoriously tight election margins back in the right direction.



RCN STATE BRANDS



COLORADO: We Make the Way
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#)



INDIANA: We Make the Future
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#)



MICHIGAN: We Make Michigan
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#)



MINNESOTA: We Make MN
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#)



OHIO: All in for Ohio
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#)



PENNSYLVANIA: We Go Together
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#)



WISCONSIN: All in Wisconsin
[Facebook](#) - [Twitter](#) - [Instagram](#)

EYES ON THE GENERAL ELECTION

Meanwhile, RCNA and our partners continued to organize towards a historic election - one marked by both unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

SHAPING NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

With the support of the RCNA and ASO Communications teams, our partners in seven key states launched their own Race Class Narrative brands that will outlive the 2020 election cycle to house their growing, multi-racial state movements.

From We Make Michigan to All in for Ohio, our partners developed and disseminated messaging guides to express our winning narrative. Their brands and messaging resources were based on rigorous research into perception and persuasion, and provided specific recommendations for members of their statewide RCN coalitions to engage their base and move the middle.

By activating shared state brands, our partners reinforced an aligned overarching narrative framework, repeating the same notes to be heard through the political noise.

RCNA IN THE FIELD

RCNA brought our narrative off the page and into the field through multiple, multi-pronged approaches, some developed and deployed fully in-house and others rendered with and by trusted allies.

Through RCNA state partners and through People's Action's 2020 deep canvassing program, tens of thousands of people across the country were trained to wield RCN messages in their organizing work - including close to 18,725 volunteers; 750 staff across organizations and labor unions; and 250 elected officials or political candidates and their staff. The script for People's Action's deep canvassing program incorporated many of the key insights from the Race Class Narrative, with research showing a 3.1% overall impact on decreasing Trump's vote margin.

In addition, from barber shops in Minneapolis to college campuses in Columbus, our partners made contact with about 4.5 million voters or potential voters - by phone, by text, at doors and by mail - reaching key populations with our tried and tested RCN messages. Partners collectively texted more than 720,000 people and reached more than 2,082,900 people by phone.



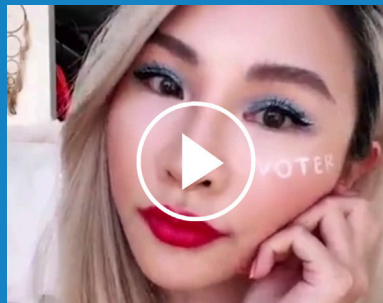
CREATIVE CONTENT AND DIGITAL STRATEGY

In a year where the pandemic sent us indoors and online, we knew that our 2020 strategy would also require a robust and innovative digital front. This was a record-shattering cycle for digital ad content, with presidential candidates and political PACs alike pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into swing states. Through our We Make the Future branding, we created a home for the Race Class Narrative [messaging framework](#) online (on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)), both modelling and providing content for our partner's brands. We supported and developed our states' digital capacity. And we ran a highly strategic, data-driven digital ad campaign across key battleground states, reaching millions of critical voters in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

Heading into election season, the RCNA team and ASO Communications collaborated with a variety of video production partners across the country to produce out-of-the-box digital ad creative that cut through the traditional political noise with high potential base voters and conflicted persuadable voters. Everything we created - from videos to illustrations to static graphics - we [made available open source](#) for use and adoption by progressive organizations, campaigners and volunteers. RCNA's ad content was used not only by local partners in pivotal states, but by national entities driving major ad buys like Win Justice PAC, Community Change Action, Way to Lead, MoveOn, and SEIU.

This year RCNA and ASO Communications — in collaboration with partners like JoLu Productions, FrameShift, SunnyBlu Art Agency, Root Story Films, and Time of Day Media — pushed the envelope with RCN-inspired ad content that ultimately drove key voters in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Minnesota to request their ballots, return their ballots, and vote early at above-average margins.

Click through to watch some of our favorites.



TIKTOK: Especially mobilized young voters



TRAFFIC JAM: Drove high video completion rates on Facebook



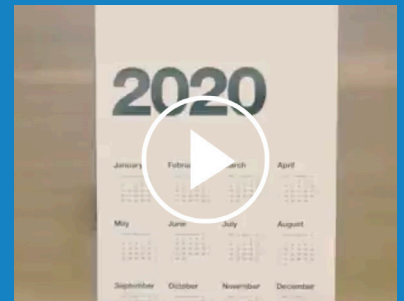
BE A VOTER: Performed well with pro-Biden supporters



WHO CARES FOR US: Performed well with low-turnout voters



BREATHE: Mobilized young voters of color in Wisconsin



CALENDAR: Drove high video completion rates on YouTube

All too often on the left, ads used by major campaigns and political groups have at best little impact on voters, and at worst demobilize the very voters we need to motivate. We set out to do digital differently. With the support of cutting edge voter data from Hawkfish Media, RCNA developed and implemented our own ad program across Facebook, YouTube and programmatic buys, focused in the battleground states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. The results were resoundingly strong, making a decisive case for scaling up our paid digital reach in future cycles.

Harnessing Hawkfish's data infrastructure and research, RCNA collaborated with our state partners and stakeholders to determine our most strategic mobilization and persuasion

audiences that overlaid with local field operations and GOTV programs. These tailored audiences were state-specific, but generally comprised of young voters, voters of color, and soft base voters, including suburban women in both Wisconsin and Minnesota and voters in five closely contested Minnesota Senate districts.

Running from October 9 to November 3 with real-time measurement and optimization on both audience selection and creative, our campaign landed more than 36.8 million impressions and garnered more than nine million video views across our full suite of creative. Our ads demonstrated unusually high engagement, with above-average video completion and click-through rates. For example, on Facebook, our “Traffic Jam” ad — developed with FrameShift — pulled a video completion rate of nearly 5% as compared to the platform average of 0.75%.

But the most pivotal results were our ads’ impact on ballot requests, returned ballots and early voting in-person (EVIP). In Wisconsin, where Joe Biden ultimately won by less than 25,000 votes, results showed very strong EVIP and ballot return rates across all audiences, from young Black voters to suburban women. In Minnesota, younger voters were especially mobilized by our creative, with a significant mobilization lift across voters under 40. And in Pennsylvania — which went to Joe Biden by less than 50,000 votes — our creative was successful in driving historically Black and Latinx low-turnout audiences to the polls. As we await official day-of results and ballot counts, we will continue to provide a deeper analysis on our ad reach and impact.

While we ran RCNA’s pilot ad program, our state partners were able to take our learnings to develop and augment their own robust paid digital strategies. For example, Faith in Minnesota’s ad program alone reached more than four million people, made more than 26 million impressions, and gained more than four million video views.

Overall, states reached tens of millions of people with Race Class Narrative-based digital ads, from Facebook to YouTube to Hulu, making more than 198.6 million impressions.

ONWARD



This election marks a turning point — the voters have spoken. From Portage to Pittsburgh, Minneapolis to Milwaukee, Americans reject the status quo and are demanding a new political order.

How we move forward together from here is more critical than ever. Race Class Narrative Action’s work in 2020 draws a roadmap towards progressive victories. Only by continuing to grow a national, multi-racial movement across race, class, age, faith, and zip code will we counter cynicism and despair, reestablish hope in our democracy, and build a brighter future for our country - one where everyone is safe and free, with a care system and economy that works for us all.

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