



PROTAGONIST



Lumina[™]
FOUNDATION

Economic Opportunity & Social Mobility Landscape: Update

December 13th, 2021

Agenda

1. Landscape Update
2. Race & Society Storylines
3. Adaptation Storylines
4. Partners' Content



Key Findings

The Re-negotiation of Labor & Worker Identity

- Through the confluence of a tight labor market, growing inflation, supply chain disruptions, and companies scrambling to hire workers, **the conversation about the opportunities (or lack thereof) available to workers has taken center stage.**
- Current storylines suggest a shift in the balance of power, **with workers in the driver's seat as they reevaluate what they want out of work** and companies struggling to respond.
- The shift in conversation to the **quality of opportunity** has implications for how higher education will be valued in the future.

Economic Opportunity Over Social Mobility

- While race and gender were prominent in the last monitoring period, the conversation is more interested in workers, companies, the changing dynamics between the two. This period's analysis demonstrates subtle changes in when and how often race is invoked in the conversation.

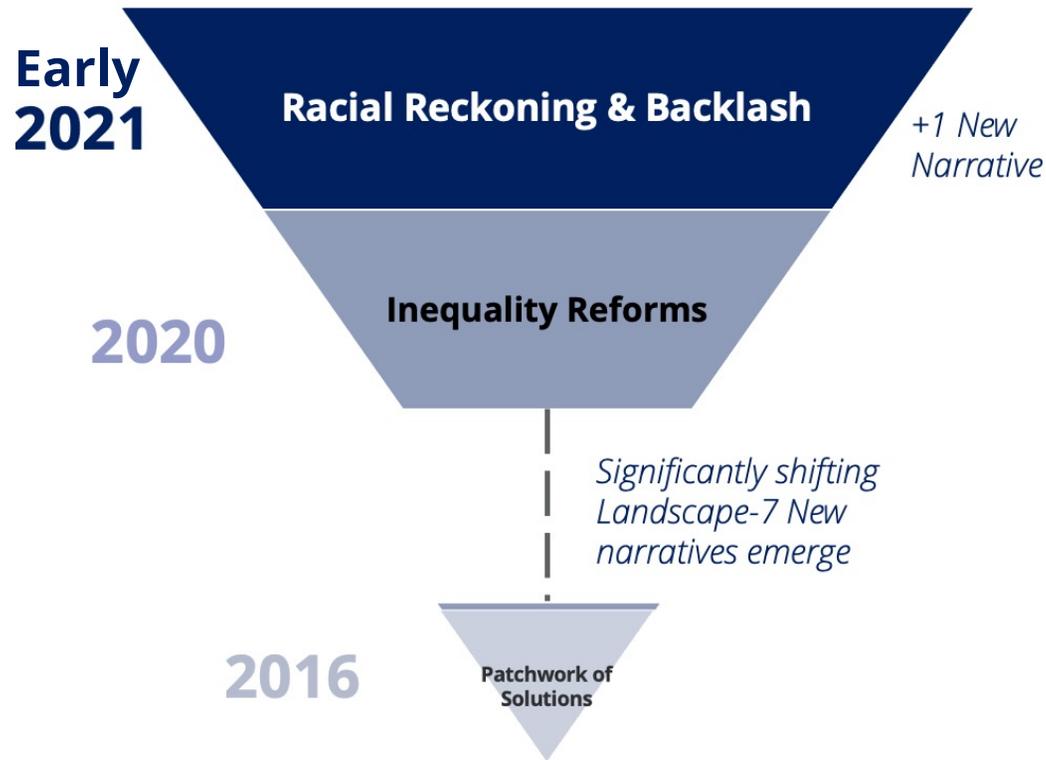
Plot to Divide America Declines

- While **the overall impact narrative declined significantly** in this time period, a closer look at the week-to-week **data suggests continued viral potential of this narrative.**
- Previously, the narrative coalesced around countering a single focal topic: minimum wage. In this period, due to a more comprehensive topic of the Build Back Better Act, **volume of the narrative remained but was not able to garner its previously seen social engagement.**



Landscape Update

The Conversation on Economic Opportunity & Social Mobility Over Time



Early 2021

- The **conversation matured** from diagnosing the role race plays in economic opportunities to identifying ways to collectively address the issue
- **A new conservative narrative emerged:** *Plot to Divide America* serves as a classic counter narrative that rejects the premise that systemic racism is to blame for enduring racial disparities
- **Key Topics & Battlelines:**
 - Addressing the Racial Wealth Gap
 - Gender Disparities in the Workplace
 - Minimum Wage

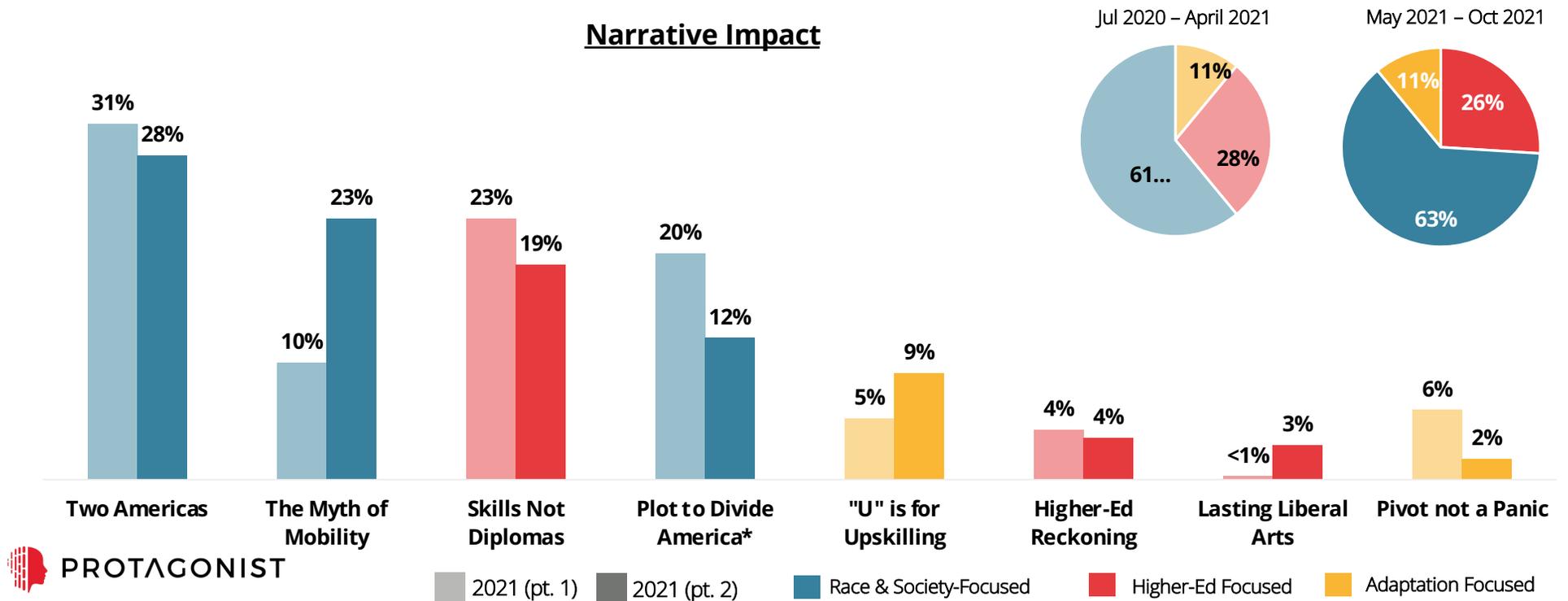
Overview of the Economic Opportunity & Social Mobility Narratives

Narrative Title	Narrative Summary
Two Americas	We cannot possibly have equal opportunity and upward mobility in this country until we address the systemic racism embedded in our society.
The Myth of Mobility	We can't fix a system that is broken without first acknowledging its problems: College is no longer the great equalizer; the middle class is disappearing; and merit no longer matters.
Plot to Divide America	In their misguided attempts to portray America as systematically racist and inherently unequal, liberals are proposing solutions that will expand inequality and destroy the economy.
Skills Not Diplomas	There are many cost-effective, proven ways of getting students into jobs, filling this country's job shortage that don't involve the traditional four-year degree.
Higher Ed Reckoning	Higher education programs must be reformed to be more adaptable, affordable, accessible, and able to prepare students for the workforce.
Lasting Liberal Arts	The critical thinking and soft skills students gain from a liberal arts education cannot be automated away and equip students to deal with a future none of us can fully imagine.
"U" is for Upskilling	In order to thrive in the new digital workplace, employers must continually upskill their workers.
A Pivot Not a Panic	We must reorient our degree and training programs to prepare people to work with technology in ways that empowers them to boost the economy with efficiencies and innovation.

The Conversation Contends With Changing Labor Market Conditions

- *Myth of Mobility* jumped significantly, reflecting a new focus on what motivates workers in post-pandemic workforce.
- In the last monitoring period, *Plot to Divide America* rose in prominence by railing against a raise in minimum wage; this time period saw its impact decline because there was not a centralized issue, suggesting the narrative thrives when attached to specific policy objectives.
- *U is for Upskilling* jumped as companies react to the tight labor market and worker demands.

Narrative Impact



Race & Society Narratives

Last period prioritized **social mobility and equitable outcomes**, whereas now the conversation now focuses on the ***quality of economic opportunity***

Race & Society Narratives Continue to Dominate the Conversation

Two Americas 28% Impact

The US is one of the most unequal countries on earth and it's only getting worse. **Low-quality, low-wage jobs** are disproportionality filled by people of color. It's impossible to make ends meet when **systemic racism** renders Black and Brown people second class citizens. This **race and gender wealth gap** will only get worse as technology advances and displaces low skill, repetitive jobs. We cannot possibly have equal opportunity and upward mobility in this country until we address the **systemic racism and sexism** embedded in our society.

The Myth of Mobility 23% Impact

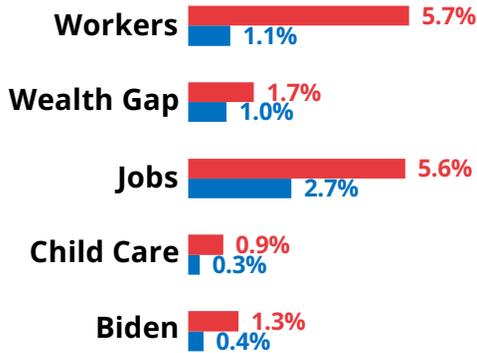
The American economy and its "on-ramp" – our nation's colleges and universities – are broken. While previous generations found that a 4-year degree was a surefire ticket to the middle class, millennials are facing the abrupt reality that **college is a doorway to debt, homeownership is a pipedream, and the stock market is one big gamble**. We can't fix a system that is broken without first acknowledging its problems: **College is no longer the great equalizer, the middle class is disappearing, and merit no longer matters**. There are solutions to these problems if we are brave enough to face them, but they won't be achieved by half-measures. **We need sweeping change-** immediate debt relief, free college, a social safety net, and jobs that pay livable wages.

Headlines Suggest an Increased Focus on Workers, Jobs in *Two Americas*

Top Terms By Narrative Headlines (July 2020-April 2021 vs. May - Oct 2021)

(% of narrative articles that contain key term)

More Prominent in *Present Period*



Examples Across Both Periods

More Retail Workers Are Leaving Jobs Than **Workers** In Any Other Industry – **Yahoo**
 Native Women Show Resilience as Frontline **Workers** Combat Wage Gaps – **Native News Online**

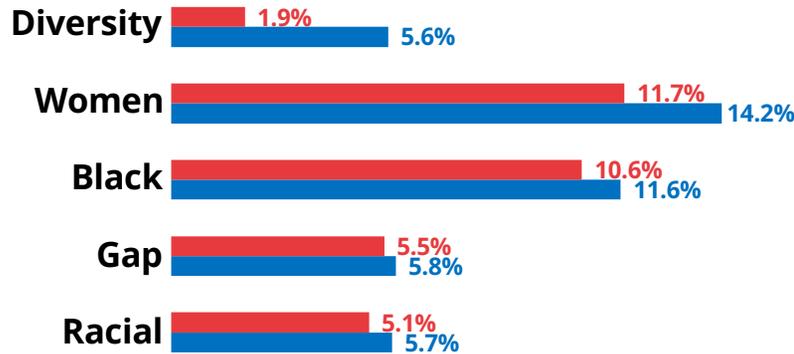
Congress is passing up a chance to close a tax loophole – and the racial **wealth gap** – **Washington Post**
 The **wealth gap**: How it happened and what can be done – **Native News Online**

We need a modern labor movement that brings good **jobs** – **Chicago Sun-times**
 Biden needs to create an infrastructure talent pipeline, not just more **jobs** – **Brookings**

To Build Back Better with Women, Invest in **Child Care** – **MS Magazine**
Child care workers, crucial to economic recovery, earn poverty wages in 40 states – **CBS News**

If the **Biden** Administration Were Serious About Racial Justice, They Would Cancel Student Debt – **Cosmopolitan**
 What Women Can Expect from a **Biden** Presidency: on Economic Security – **MS Magazine**

More Prominent in *Previous Period*



One reason for the tech industry's Great Resignation: lack of **diversity** – **Fast Company**
 Equal access to tech can reduce poverty and increase **diversity** – **The Hill**

It Is Essential That We Pave a Road For **Women** In Tech. Here's How – **Forbes**
 Covid-19's Impact on Working **Women** Is an Unprecedented Disaster – **Smithsonian Magazine**

FACT SHEET: The Biden-Harris Administration Advances Equity and Opportunity for **Black** People and Communities Across the Country – **White House**
 After Years of Gains, **Black** STEM Representation Is Falling. Why? – **Undark Magazine**

Senate Republicans block bill targeting gender pay **gap** – **Politico**
 The labor market doesn't have a 'skills **gap**'—it has an opportunity gap – **Brookings**

Biden's Tax Enforcement Overhaul Would Be A Positive Step Toward **Racial** Equity – **American Progress**
 STEM's **racial**, ethnic and gender gaps are still strikingly large – **Brookings**

Myth of Mobility: Storylines

I Think I'll Wait

Of course I want to go back to work, but I'm hesitant. The risk of COVID is still very much present, particularly for in-person, hourly positions. Plus – who's going to look after my kids while I'm working? I'm going to take my time and find the right opportunity. Now that workers have the upper hand, I can afford to be picky.

- Conversation about the **ongoing tight labor market** was front and center, with coverage mainly focused on the effects seen in the restaurant, retail, and other **industries that depend on hourly or low-wage workers**.
- For retail and blue-collar workers, it's **a demand for better working conditions, a living wage**, and an acknowledgment that their essential work in the pandemic puts their lives in danger much more than it does for office workers.
- This storyline **offers workers a sense of agency** in a narrative that articulates the frustration of an economic system that doesn't work for the majority.



States cutting unemployment benefits didn't get people back to work, study finds

CNBC, 17,500 social shares

Why Wage Increases And Sign-On Bonuses Aren't Enticing Workers To Search For New Jobs

Forbes, 6,200 social shares

To Build Back Better with Women, Invest in Child Care

Ms. Magazine, 11,300 social shares

Retail workers are quitting at record rates for higher-paying work: 'My life isn't worth a dead-end job'

The Washington Post, 68,000 social shares

Myth of Mobility: Storylines

The Great Resignation

Long, hard, and stressful hours have taken their toll. Whether it's in a service industry or corporate America, the pandemic has made people rethink their work and life goals. Now is a good time to switch careers or start your own business. It's not quitting – it's pursuing the next opportunity.

- This storyline **mainly covers white-collar workers, who have the luxury of quitting** to either go somewhere with more flexibility, better pay, fewer hours, less stress – or deciding on a mid-career change to pursue something completely different that more aligns with their passions or interests.
- For these workers, there is **a changing perspective that work may not be the centerpiece of your identity anymore**, and people are pursuing work they actually want to do with much less stressful hours and pressure.
- Similar to the "I Think I'll Wait" storyline, "The Great Resignation" challenges *Myth of Mobility* as workers are reassessing what jobs are and what they can and should provide. This will have **ripple effects for higher education as workers reassess what training and skills are needed for their roles.**



The Revolt of the American Worker

The New York Times, 7,300 social shares

The death of the job

Vox, 8,700 social shares

Why many Black employees don't want to return to the office

CBS News, 2,900 social shares

Plot To Divide America Recedes Slightly...

Plot to Divide America 12% Impact

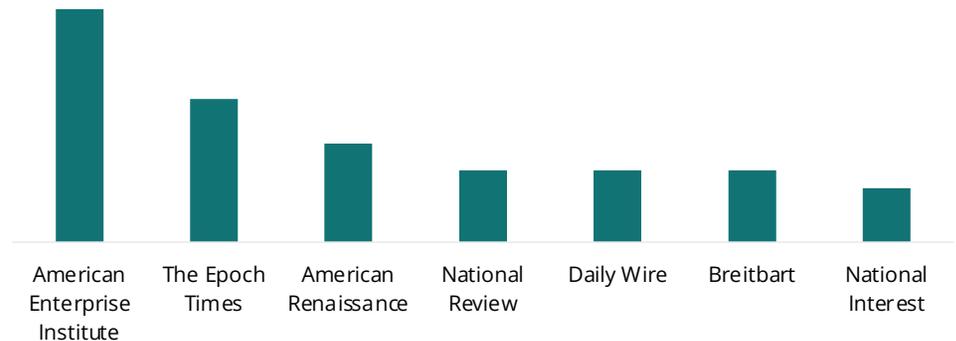
This endless **focus on race, racism, and our differences is dividing and destroying America**. Rather than offer productive solutions to help strengthen the economy and provide economic opportunities to all Americans-**allegations that America is systematically racist are tearing the country apart**. Racism may be real, but its not the root cause of every social ill. **Reinterpreting American history** and using **identity politics** to support for misguided social and economic policies will destroy American entrepreneurship and **further erode** the values of hard work and **exceptionalism** that **makes America great**.

- *Plot to Divide America* is a classic counternarrative, and a **catch all for conservative grievances**. It rejects the emphasis on acknowledging systematic racism in *Two Americas* and instead politicizes the discussion of race by claiming that it is disingenuous and misdiagnoses the core causes of racial disparities.

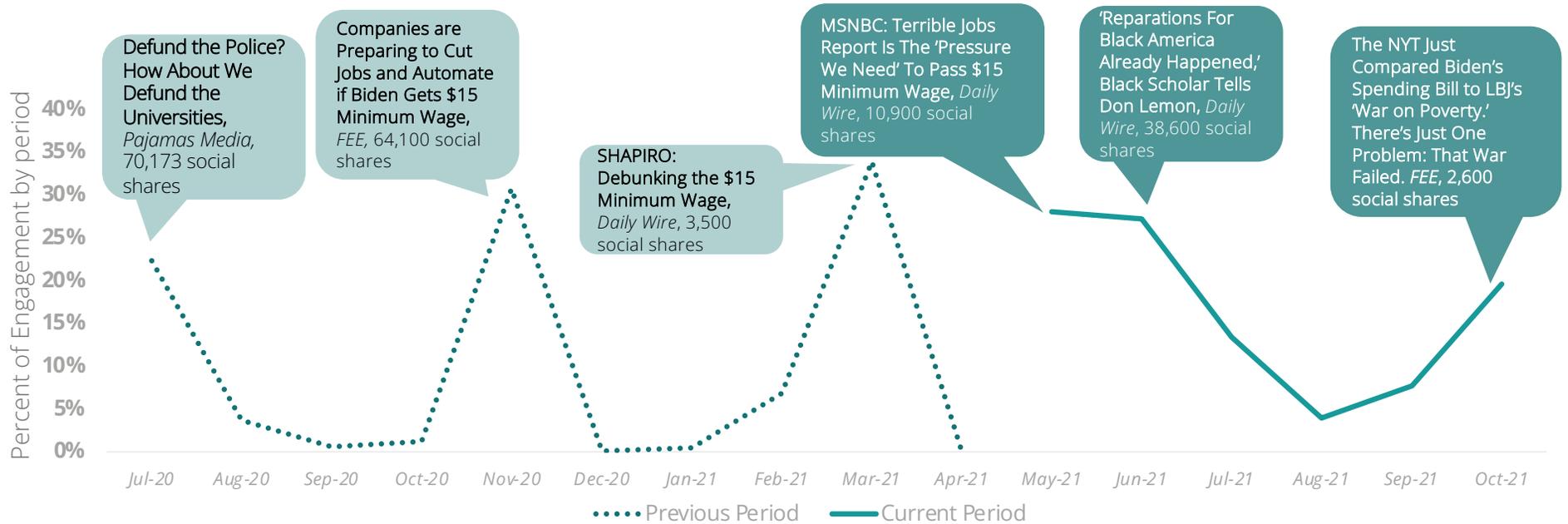


Top Media Sources - 99% of impact comes from 10 sources

Highly concentrated media conversation in a handful of conservative sources that reinforce and amplify a disciplined message



...But Retains Viral Potential



- In a continued trend from last period, *Plot to Divide America* is an engagement-driven narrative that responds most strongly to progressive policy initiatives
- Race is particularly of interest in this narrative, fervently arguing against policy interventions that address systemic racism.

Plot to Divide America: Storylines

Battling the Build Back Better Act

The Liberal agenda is to blame for the worsening labor shortage and The Build Back Better Act is only going to make it worse. These policies will undermine the American work ethic. Of course there's a labor shortage – no one wants to work when there's government handouts! The unemployment safety net is being stretched to become a profitable hammock for those choosing not to work.

- Argues that only putting people to work will reduce poverty in America and that benefits should be earned – people should be seeking work, not handouts.
- Advocates that the government overspending (e.g. COVID-19 benefits) and overregulation (e.g. vaccine mandates in work settings) are exacerbating inflation and the labor shortage.



Unemployment Benefits Forever: Biden's Dream of American Dependence

But solving poverty and joblessness takes more than cash.

Spectator, 551 social shares

The NYT Just Compared Biden's Spending Bill to LBJ's 'War on Poverty.' There's Just One Problem: That War Failed

FEE, 2,600 social shares

PINKERTON: BIDENFLATION MEETS BIDENUNEMPLOYMENT

Breitbart, 2,000 social shares

Plot to Divide America: Storylines

A BA in Uselessness

With a focus on diversity rather than hard skills, schools are setting up young people to fail. Students are being funneled into college programs, where they graduate with minimal useful skills for gainful employment. There are so many technical fields where young people could be successful. Vocation needs to be encouraged; the pathway to success isn't dependent on a college education.

- This storyline is a **direct critique to *Lasting Liberal Arts***, believing the **Left is to blame for shaping higher education to further their own ideology and agenda**, rather than shepherding students into the right degree program.
- It **focuses on traditional college-aged students** and their post-degree outcomes. It laments that prioritizing social justice and diversity over merit does students a disservice. Many articles talk about the eroding “American work ethic” where **students are underprepared and lack the vital experience necessary to become functionals, contributing adult members of society.**

MATHEMATICIANS: CHINA RISES AS WORLD'S STEM LEADER WHILE AMERICAN SCHOOLS PLACE DIVERSITY FIRST

Breitbart, 14,600 social shares

A Shocking Number of College Grads Wish They Had Been Taught More Life Skills

PJ Media, 8,300 social shares

Study Finds a Culture of Laziness: Nearly 20% of Young Adults Are Throwing Their Lives Away for Nothing

Western Journal, 1,200 social shares

America's supply chain issues begin in our schools, not our shipyards

The Washington Times, 446 social shares

Plot to Divide America: Storylines

Your Degree, Your Burden

Why are students so shocked when they pick monetarily unfruitful degrees and then struggle to find well-paying jobs that can help pay off the loans needed to pursue said degrees? It is the responsibility of the graduate to shoulder the debt burden, not taxpayers.

- A report by the *Wall Street Journal* analyzed the cost and value of graduate programs reignited partisan talking points regarding an individual responsibility to repay their loans.
- Articles use this storyline as an opportunity to criticize progressive proposals that suggest **taxpayers will be the ones to pay off student loans.**

WSJ: ELITE SCHOOLS LEAVE GRAD STUDENTS BURIED UNDER MOUNTAINS OF DEBT

Breitbart, 767 social shares

Analysis: Columbia Film Graduates Carry \$181,000 In Loans, Make Less Than \$30,000 Per Year

Daily Wire, 11,700 social shares

How Taxpayers End Up Paying Off the Insane Tuition Costs of Grad Programs at Elite Colleges

FEE Stories, 157 social shares

Higher Ed Storylines

A *Wall Street Journal* report that analyzed the cost and value of graduate programs touched off a new storyline **questioning the value of opportunity and advancement masters' programs offer.**

Higher Ed Reckoning: Storylines

The Master's Trap

For colleges and universities, master's degrees have become an enormous moneymaking scheme, wherein the line between for-profit and nonprofit education has been utterly blurred. These predatory programs can often look extremely attractive and academically rigorous, and oftentimes provide fulfilling experiences for those who attend. But that's not the point. For the schools, these programs are literal cash cows.

- A report by the *Wall Street Journal* ignited a wave of a direct attack on certain **graduate programs at elite institutions**. This attack is often pointed towards degrees that ostensibly do not have a high monetary return on investment.
- Coverage of this storyline describes elite master's degree programs in ways **akin to for-profit colleges: predatory programs that promise fruitful careers thanks to the prestige of their institution yet saddle their students with mountains of debt with no real job prospects to pay them off**.
- This storyline calls into question the value of a master's degree as a worthwhile investment, further implicating higher ed as a compromised part of a failing system.



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Higher Education

Public colleges and universities under fire for promoting controversial education loans

The Washington Post, 79 social shares

Sunday Reading: A Cautionary Tale of Academic Dreams Sold For Profit With Little Return on Investment

Indy Week, 0 social shares

Master's Degrees Are the Second Biggest Scam in Higher Education

And elite universities deserve a huge share of the blame.

Slate, 49,400 social shares

Adaptation Storylines

- **The tight labor market has also beckoned a macrolevel shift on how companies approach attracting, training, and retaining talent.**
- Organizations are adapting by offering more flexibility, benefits, and perks in order to address this phenomenon. This could have **implications for the public's view of the relationship between education and work,** and what the role of higher education is in opportunity and mobility.

“U” Is for Upskilling: Storylines

Desperately Catering to Employees

With workers gaining more leverage by day in this tightened labor market, companies are scrambling to offer benefits and incentives to attract and retain workers. Many retailers are dangling paying for college hoping attract and entice hourly employees.

- Previously, large companies attracted attention when they announced plans to begin their own internal upskilling programs to retain workers. Now, some of these very same **companies are now offering to fund employees to continue their higher education elsewhere.**
- This storyline is framed as **a response to the tight labor market and changing demands of workers.** Companies are scrambling to address the scarcity of workers in a way that appeals to workers' higher career ambitions.

Amazon to cover 100% of college tuition for U.S. hourly employees

CNBC, 21,900 social shares

Walmart Will Now Pay For Its Employees' College Education

America's largest private employer introduced the incentive as many industries struggle to hire employees.

Now This, 5,500 social shares

Target And Walmart Are Offering Free College Tuition To Attract And Retain Workers

Forbes, 4,700 social shares

Walmart To Pay 100% Of Tuition And Books For Associates Continuing Their Education

Forbes, 871 social shares

Pivot Not a Panic: Storylines

Okay, Maybe a Little Bit of a Panic

If the pandemic was the previous wave of ushering in the use of A.I. and automation into the workforce, then the labor shortage is the latest. This time around we see consequences from both factors – with previous and current implementations of A.I. directly costing Americans their jobs.

- In contrast to findings in the previous time period - a time of growing optimism around COVID's acceleration of automation in the workplace - this period had higher **prominence of articles raising concern.**
- There is evidence that the **implementation of AI and automation** (both at the system and process levels) comes at a **price directly paid by workers, particularly by women, people of color, and the lower and middle classes.**
- The acceleration of AI implementation is viewed as the result of allowing AI and automation to take roles over without first fully understanding and planning for the outcomes.
 - This mirrors a similar, broader conversation within the tech world of not doing due diligence with the implementation of AI.

AI tools that companies use to scan resumes are stopping 27 million people finding new jobs, a Harvard report says

Business Insider, 3,000 social shares

Automation helped kill up to 70% of the US's middle-class jobs since 1980, study says

Business Insider, 1,900 social shares

Artificial Intelligence Has Caused A 50% To 70% Decrease In Wages— Creating Income Inequality And Threatening Millions Of Jobs

Forbes, 1,600 social shares

Covid Brings Automation to the Workplace, Killing Some Jobs

Unable to find enough workers, employers are turning to technology to perform tasks—and women are likely to be the hardest hit.

WIRED, 345 social shares

Partners

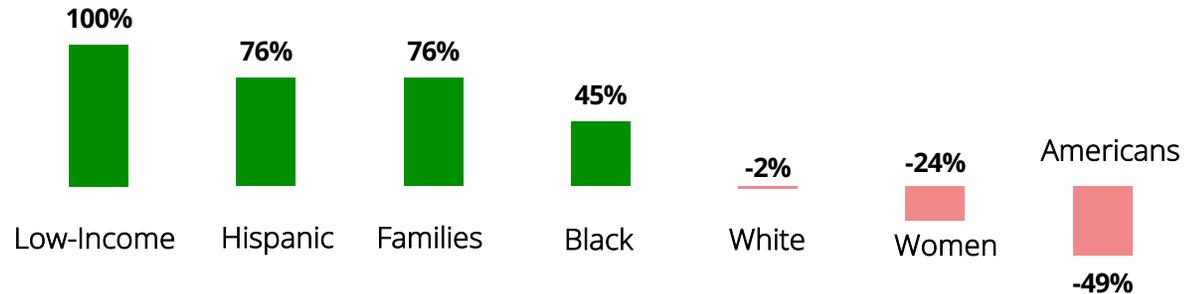
- ***Two Americas & Skills Not Diplomas Prominent:*** The majority of partner content aligns with *Two Americas* (58%) or *Skills Not Diplomas* (24%)
- **Success Shifts Away from Problem-Framing Headlines:** In contrast to last period, Partner headlines moved toward a greater focus on solutions.
 - Discussion of the benefits of coming policies like **the Build Back Better Act, garnered significant engagement.**

Where Partners Are Focused

Headline Term Prominence: Partners vs Overall Media: (May 2021 – October 2021)

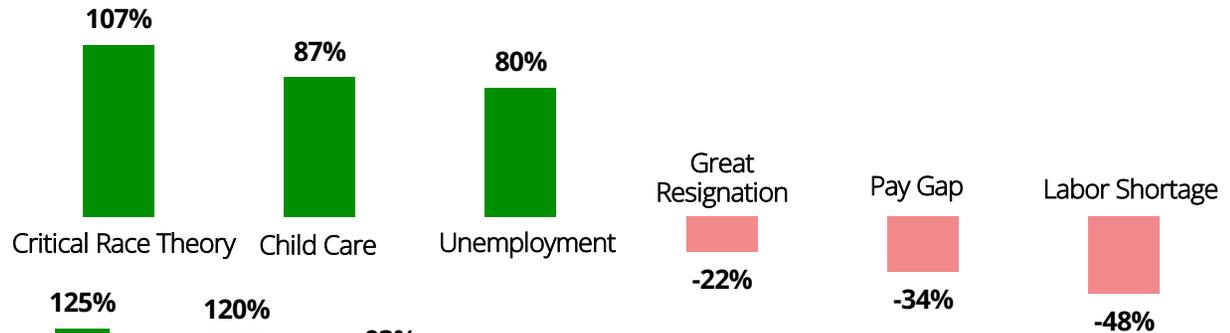
Who features more prominently in Partner content?

- Partners continue to put communities and families with higher barriers of entry at the forefront of their content.



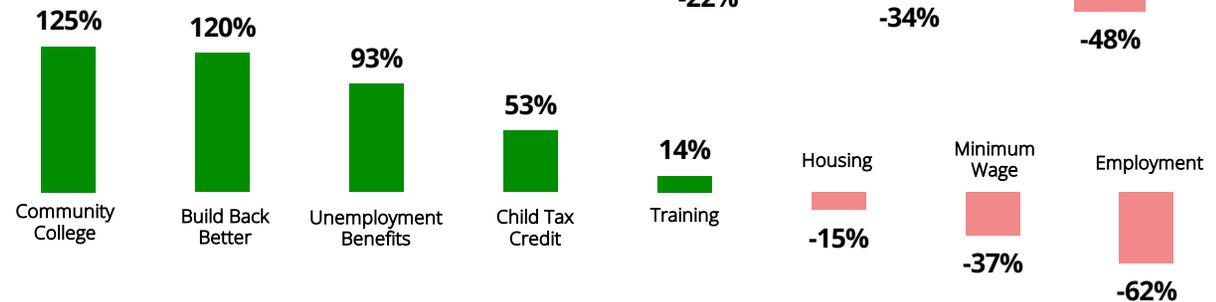
What issues do partners elevate?

- Partners less focused on the broader issues related to the changing workforce.



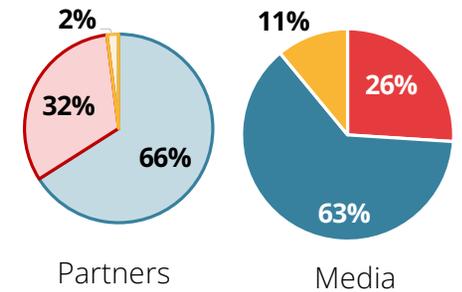
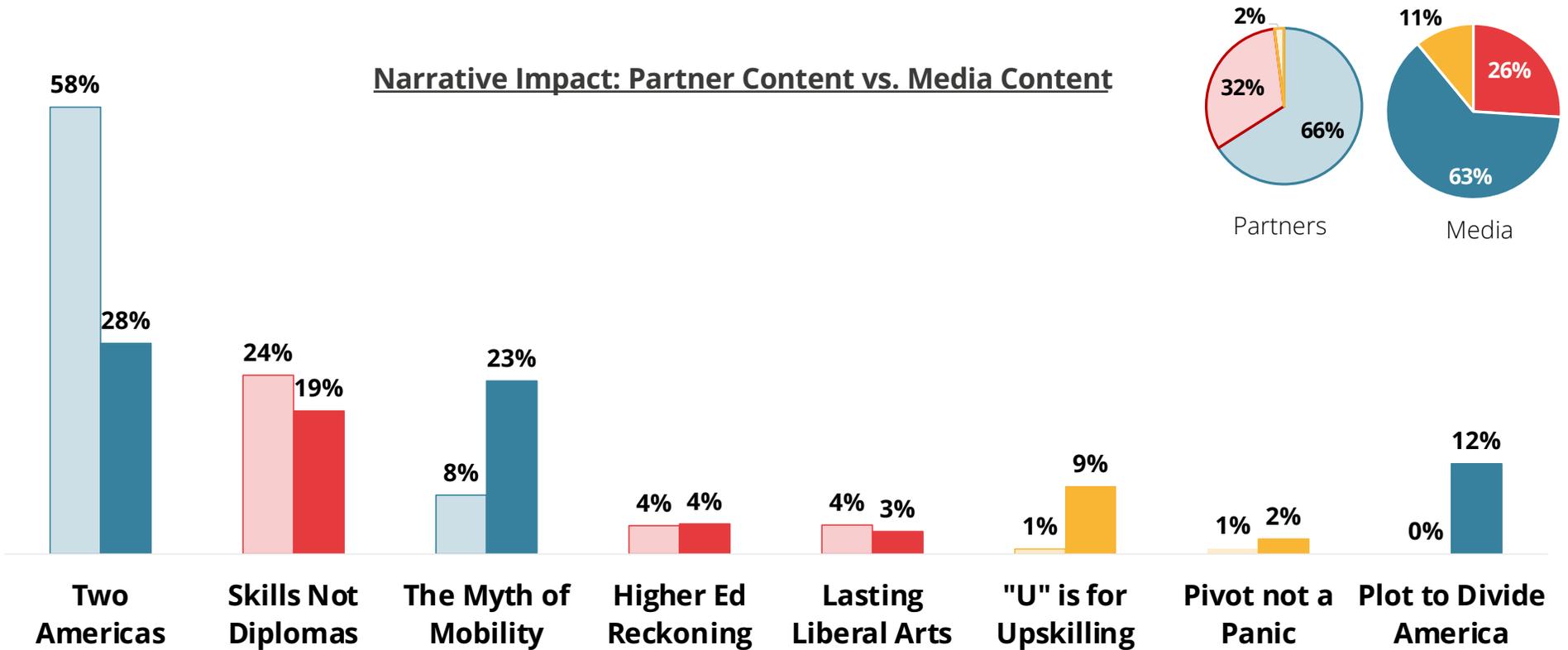
Which solutions are partners discussing?

- Partners are focused on components of the Build Back Better Act.



Partners Champion *Two Americas*, Disregard Adaptation Focused Narratives Compared to the Overall Media Discourse

Narrative Impact: Partner Content vs. Media Content



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Partner Content

Public Media

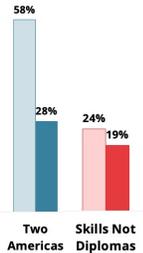
Race & Society-Focused

Higher-Ed Focused

Adaptation Focused

The Majority of Partners' Focus is on *Two Americas & Skills Not Diplomas*

- Partners continue to focus on communities of color, income status, and the specific barriers to higher education that these groups face.
- There was a high degree of advocating for workforce training as a solution for addressing economic recovery and the labor shortage.



Georgetown CEW
@GeorgetownCEW

Canceling a portion of student loan debt across the board would promote racial, gender, and economic equity among college graduates, and aid adults who were unable to finish their degrees or earn enough to make loan payments.
[#StudentDebtDilemma](#)



medium.com
The Student Debt Dilemma
College is worth the cost, but too many students end up with an unmanageable student debt burden.

8:06 AM · May 30, 2021 · Meltwater Social

The Education Trust
@EdTrust

A1: We're @edtrust, a national nonprofit that promotes closing opportunity gaps by expanding excellence & equity in education for students of color & those from low-income backgrounds from #PreK through #College!
[#BlackStudentDebtChat](#) [#BlackStudentDebt](#)

12:01 PM · Oct 20, 2021 · Twitter Web App

The Education Trust
@EdTrust

[#BlackBorrowers](#) pay more for college and have higher rates of default. Targeting the racial wealth gap is key to tackling [#BlackStudentDebt](#). Read more here:

National Skills Coalition
@SkillsCoalition

An inclusive recovery requires that Congress send a package to the president's desk with investments in workforce training and industry connected, worker-friendly community college. More details later this week over on the Skills Blog.

JFF
@jfftweets

This is why equitable economic recovery demands [#workforce](#) training. We need to move beyond the traditional [#college](#) degree. [#FundWkDev](#) @SkillsCoalition



nytimes.com
Skilled Workers Are Scarce, Posing a Challenge for Biden's Infrastructure Plan
One estimate says the bill would add \$1.4 trillion to the U.S. economy over eight years, but without enough workers, efforts to strengthen roads and public transit could be s...

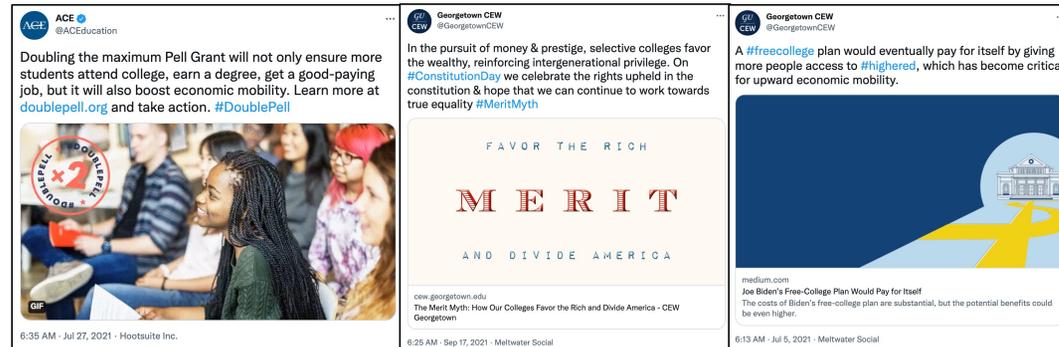
Other Narratives Partners Utilize

- Illustrative examples by partners discussing other narratives.
- The box below includes some of the most frequently used and engaged with hashtags by partners within the EOSM conversation.

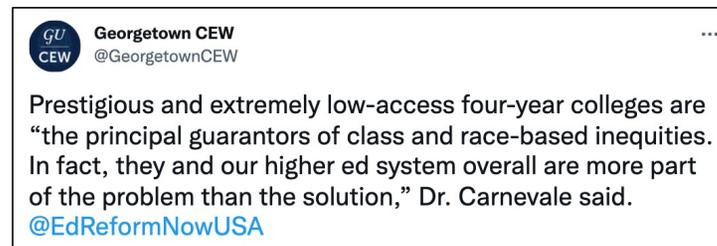
Top Partner EOSM Hashtags

#HigherEd	#CollegeCompetitionFund
#College	#EdPolicy
#Equity	#CalGrant
#Career	#Comm_College
#Childcare	#FreeCollege
#DoublePell	#Apprenticeships
#DualEnrollment	#BlackStudentDebt

Myth of Mobility



Higher Ed Reckoning



Partner Headlines on EOSM Shift Away from Problem-Focus

Compared to last period where high engagement articles were predominantly problem-focused, many articles that garnered high attention viewed brewing changes to the workforce and coming infrastructure policies as exciting areas of progress.

Problem-focused
 Mixed/Neutral
 Solutions-Focused

Partner	Headline	Engagement over Partner Average
CAP	<i>Biden's Tax Enforcement Overhaul Would Be A Positive Step Toward Racial Equity</i>	104X (21,810)
Brookings	<i>Long shadows: The Black-white gap in multigenerational poverty</i>	47X (9,836)
Brookings	<i>Student debt forgiveness would impact nearly every aspect of people's lives</i>	15X (3,184)
Marketplace	<i>Is a new labor movement brewing?</i>	11X (2,402)
CAP	<i>President Biden's Home Care Proposal Would Create Massive Job Growth in Every State</i>	11X (2,324)
CAP	<i>The Build Back Better Act Would Greatly Lower Families' Child Care Costs</i>	11X (2,319)
Chalkbeat	<i>Second-generation college students need support, too</i>	6.6X (1,382)
Brookings	<i>Is free college a good idea? Increasingly, evidence says yes</i>	4.4X (921)
Conservation	<i>Canceling student loan debt will barely boost the economy, but a targeted approach could help certain groups</i>	4.2X (876)
Hechinger	<i>College degree doesn't pay off as well for first-generation grads</i>	3.5X (732)
Brookings	<i>Student loans, the racial wealth divide, and why we need full student debt cancellation</i>	2.8X (598)

Methodology Overview

- Protagonist used a **targeted key word approach** to isolate articles over a 6 month period (May 2021 – October 2021) that talk about the intersection of economic opportunity and social mobility with higher education.
 - Of the 286 key terms, at least one had to be either **in the title** or had to be **mentioned multiple times in the body of the article** to be included for analysis.
- To further target content related to four-year degree programs, isolated content also had to be **relevant to themes such as race, skills, employment, mobility, equity, the future of higher ed & work, and/or alternative pathways.**

Query Terms for Skills & Employment

Sample of 10 words used:

- Employment
- Training
- Find a Job
- Re/Up-skilling

Query Terms for Mobility & Equity

Sample of 20 words used:

- American Dream
- Social Mobility
- Equal Opportunities
- Income Inequality

Query Terms for Future of Work

Sample of 15 words used:

- Automation
- Future of work
- Future Jobs
- Changing job market

Query Terms for Alternative Pathways

Sample of 14 words used:

- Associate's degree
- MOOC
- CTE
- Bootcamp



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Thank You

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