

## ISOJ 2021: Day 5, Panel

### Race and equity in the news: Reporting in service of communities and with the URL lens

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**Chair:** [Sara Lomax-Reese](#), *co-founder, URL Media*, president & CEO, WURD Radio

- [Cierra Hinton](#), *executive-director & publisher, Scalawag*
  - [Mitra Kalita](#), *co-founder URL Media*, founder, EpicenterNYC
  - [Macollvie J. Neel](#), *managing editor, The Hatian Times*
  - [Nancy San Martin](#), *freelance journalist*, contributor at palabra. NAHJ
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**Mallary Tenore** Hello and welcome back, everyone. I'm so glad you're here with us today. We have about 7,200 registrants from 135 countries joining us, so I'm really happy to have you in the audience with us for this final day of ISOJ. So before we get started with our next panel, I'd like to share just a few notes and also give a big shout out and special thanks to the Knight Foundation and Google News Initiative for sponsoring this year's ISOJ. I also want to remind everyone that this panel will be simultaneously interpreted into Spanish. So if you click on the globe icon in Zoom and you select the Spanish channel, you'll be able to listen in via Spanish. And if at any point you have trouble with Zoom, you can always tune in via YouTube in English and Spanish instead, and we will have the links to those YouTube pages in the Zoom chat for you to access.

So we're now going to turn our attention to today's panel titled Race and Equity in the News: Reporting in Service of Communities and with the URL (Uplift, Respect and Love) Lens. And I think that that's actually my favorite title of all of this year's ISOJ sessions and really looking forward to this panel. It's going to be led by Sara Lomax-Reese, who is president and CEO of WURD Radio, Pennsylvania's only African-American owned talk radio station. So she'll be joined by four talented journalists who will talk about how they're each covering race and equity through a respectful and inclusive lens. I'm sure those of you in the audience are going to have a lot of questions. So please post those in the chat, and we'll get to them at the end of the conversation. And you can also tweet highlights using the hashtag #ISOJ2021. Now with that, let's get started.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Hi, I'm Sara Lomax-Reese, and I am the co-founder of the URL Media Network, as well as the CEO and president of WURD Radio in Philadelphia. And I'm so excited to have the opportunity to talk to you all about URL media network and the work that we are doing to empower Black- and brown-owned and led media organizations in partnership with my co-founder Mitra Kalita, who is going to walk through this brief presentation before we introduce some of our amazing partners to have a powerful conversation about race and equity in the news, and how we as media organizations of color empower, uplift, respect and love, which is what URL stands for, how we do that for our individual communities and as a collective. Hello, Mitra.

**Mitra Kalita** Hi, Sara. It's good to be here with you.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** So do you want to jump in?

**Mitra Kalita** Sure. So I think it's worth rewinding a little bit there and kind of talking about our own backgrounds. We're not only co-founders of this network, but we're also

members. And Sara and I have known each other for a few years. When we were talking about URL before it was URL, it felt like we were facing a big problem that required a big solution, but we didn't want to sacrifice what each of us as individual entities represent to our communities. At the time I was at CNN. I spent my entire career in mainstream media. The reach of mainstream media, I think, is not in question. The trust, intimacy and relevance to people of color is very much in question. And so URL media was born out of an effort to, in some ways, band together the small to achieve scale that might have a chance not just against the behemoths of the Internet, which we'll go through on our next slide and kind of how we were founded, but also with an eye toward sustainability of each of our individual ventures.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Yeah, so if you go to the next slide, we'll jump into who our partners are, and what URL is really about. Right now URL is a network of eight independent media organizations that are all serving Black and brown communities. And Mitra and my organization, WURD, and Epicenter are two of those eight. We also will be hearing in a minute from Palabra, the Haitian Times, and Scalawag who are with us today. But we also have Documented, TBN 24, and ScrollStack. And so these right now, that is the composition of the URL Media network. Our intention is to grow that significantly, both geographically, and nationally, and also internationally. And our goal is to share content, share resources, as well as share revenues as a way to help us empower and strengthen these organizations that are doing already such amazing work in service of their communities, but also their challenges, their obstacles, their limitations sometimes to being independent. And we're thinking that if we can collaborate and combine our efforts, there are opportunities for us to do even more and to be leaders in this media space in addition to serving authentically our audiences.

**Mitra Kalita** I think it's also worth noting, just because it's kind of displayed before us, that on the right, are mainstream media brands that are truly a list of brands, we are not working with those entities. I just want to clarify that. But I also think that the partnership with mainstream media in this process is worth underscoring. Many of us are familiar, whether it's within our own outlets or working on the right side of the screen in mainstream media, the power of niche audiences, and how stories that are in our communities, I can give you some examples as we go on in the discussion, are often as early as six weeks, even months earlier to the mainstream media. And so the value proposition we offer is not just to the partners themselves in sharing content, but also the opportunity down the road to syndicate that content to mainstream media, including some of the brands as outlined here. But again, very hypothetically. Sara, I don't know if you want to talk about ad networks a little bit? I can pick that up, too, but you're a little better at that.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** If we keep going on, we'll talk about the way that we envision the structure of the business proposition. So if we go to the next slide. Really the idea, the the growth or the birth, of this idea came right when we were looking at all of these racial justice protests and the global uprisings around systemic racism and white supremacy. And we recognized, I think everybody recognizes, that the mainstream media is complicit in kind of perpetuating and continuing the ways in which anti-Black racism and white supremacy manifests in society. And so we know that a lot of newsrooms are struggling with diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. And so we wanted to kind of meet that moment head on with this idea of strengthening this very powerful history and legacy of Black- and brown-owned media organizations that have been in the trenches doing the work for many, many years, but are also often not considered in the equation around diversity, equity and inclusion. And so just creating autonomy, and independence, and

centering our voices, our viewpoints, our communities is absolutely pivotal in the URL Media concept. If you could go to the next slide. So, Mitra, you take this.

**Mitra Kalita** So I think one thing to think about is the coalition that we represent. Right. And you'll hear us describe this as a Black and brown network, and I think it's important to note two things here. The first is that we still center Black voices. That's a very important part of our identity. We believe that if we solve for Black America, everybody else benefits. We have countless examples of that historically and as a media network that felt like a very important guiding principle of our work. On the other hand, there is strength in numbers, partly because of the partners who we have. We've come out of the gate with more than, at least on Facebook, more than four million users already because of the scale that a TBN 24 and ScrollStack represent in South Asia, just as an example. And so I think it's important to leverage the scale of some of our communities, not just in the United States, as far as the growing demographic of the future of our audiences, but also the global population. Eighty percent of the world is Black or brown. Does 80 percent of the world feel governed by Black and brown centric media? Absolutely not. I would say that we've heard from folks all around the world that love this model and certainly do see global application. I think also there's an element from the previous slide that also relates to systemic racism and how our newsrooms were built in terms of staffing, but also what their missions were. In some ways, the benefit of starting anew is that we get to rethink many of the practices that we take as that's just how journalism ethics work, or that's just how you do a police story, and get to unravel the systemic racism that might have led to the production of journalism as we know it. I think that's one of the greatest opportunities before us. I am going to ask Sara to pick up on ownership because while I believe in it fervently, I feel like she's kind of emblematic of what it means to be a Black-owned business and thriving.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Yeah. So WURD, we've been in the game for almost 20 years. I've been running it for 10 years. And one of the things that I have brought to a lot of these conversations is that ownership absolutely matters in how you structure your content, how you structure your business priorities, how you own the relationships that you have with your audiences, and how you can really create a model that is driven by service, is driven by what the community actually needs. And so I think that this notion of ownership and wealth creation is another piece around the URL model. We talk a lot about business models, nonprofit, for profit. And it was very important to Mitra and I to make URL a for-profit business model, because we believe that there is a racial wealth gap that exists in this country, and we want to be able to meet that head on with the possibility of creating scalable revenue, scalable wealth that could actually make meaningful changes in kind of the wealth dynamics and the wealth equation. And so we have a big vision. We have big goals in terms of creating opportunities for not just for URL, but for all of the entities that are a part of the network from a financial standpoint.

So the business model. We've talked about it a little bit, but I'll talk about the ad network, because I think that that's the piece that Mitra referenced before. There's multiple ways that the URL network is structured from a business standpoint. But one of the important and early opportunities that we've seen is through creating like an ad network. So we know that through the moment that we're in a lot of corporations recognizing the importance of communicating directly with Black and brown audiences, and so we believe that URL represents an amazing opportunity to reach audiences that are really connected with each of our media entities. But there's an opportunity to come in through one direction and reach many. And so we are looking at revenue shares of advertising. So an advertiser comes into the network, they get to reach the Black, the Latino, the Asian communities

through our partners, and there's an opportunity that each of our media organizations benefit from those revenues. And that is a really exciting and powerful model that is proving to be valuable, and it's working. Do you want to talk about the other ones, Mitra?

**Mitra Kalita** Yeah, I think we talked about syndication, and we talked about platform optimization. The network membership, we really are only as powerful as our network. The content they produce. But also it's significant, I mentioned digital disruption earlier. In some ways, it's not just that each partner represents, let's say, a different ethnic identity or a niche group to the partnership. We also have one live streamer. Sara has a radio station. Our partner at Documented has done some amazing work on WhatsApp, and in Spanish, and is, I believe, looking at Chinese and some other languages to reach communities and the places that they're at. And so what we hope is that it's not just this idea of we're a part of a people of color network, which, of course, there is strength in numbers, as I mentioned, but also that if you are a newsletter as Epicenter was born, you can leverage TBN 24's live stream community to greater good, which I think on the last slide I have an example on that one.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** And do you want to mention the network membership?

**Mitra Kalita** Sure. So that's basically where I was going as far as being able to access content from one to many. And we do see great growth in, as Sarah has mentioned, we have eight inaugural members. Now, there's a pretty aggressive plan, though, to get bigger on that front so that you can almost slice and dice the network, which matters, I think, both for content, if you think about running storylines, as well as for the ad network. So each of these areas very much do integrate with each other. Next slide.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** That's us. Yeah, we can we can go to the next one.

**Mitra Kalita** I mean, we are impressed with us, Sarah, but we don't need to dwell on it.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Yes, we don't need to read our bios. And this is just our last slide. This is really just some of our early wins. We've gotten coverage in a number of journalism publications, as well as Axios. And the sample of our newsletter that we we generate from URL, which features the work of all of our member partners, and also just really highlighting this amazing work that like Mitra is doing with Epicenter and vaccinations and just the different ways that we're approaching the challenges that our communities are facing and meeting the moment with solutions and with access. And so we're super excited about the momentum that we have begun to create and are looking forward to accelerating that as the year continues to move on. Mitra I don't know if you have a closing thought?

**Mitra Kalita** I was just going to pick up on that, Sara, that on the vaccination front, I think all of us want to continue to stay ourselves but be able to leverage the power of amplification from each other. And so the vaccine initiative that Sara was referring to, Epicenter launched as a newsletter to get through the pandemic. Once we hit January, the vaccines, really felt like the greatest need in our community. And so we started to let people know we were available to help them book, and it became word of mouth. But it's not until we leveraged the power of the URL media network that we really took off and were able to scale. There was almost a boomerang effect back from our niche community as a result of the URL network. So what do I mean by that? We are in the epicenter of the epicenter. We're based in Jackson Heights. Corona and Elmhurst is kind of the immediate community around us. Because of the work that Sara's radio station has done with a

doctor who's gotten a lot of attention recently, she was just on Good Morning America, Dr. Ala Stanford. I had heard of this woman and heard her approach to both COVID testing as well as ultimately vaccines were not on kind of what we see a lot of celebrities getting vaccinated, but she really focused on word of mouth and the power of communities. And so it was in an interview that she did on WURD, where she talked about this, that I really kind of leaned into that as the guiding principle of how Epicenter was going to, through word of mouth, spread vaccine awareness, as well as the ability to get help from us to book. What did I do next? So I called up Habib Rahman, who founded TBN 24, also a member of our network, and I said, "Could you let people know that we're offering this?" There's a lot of Bangladeshis in Queens, and so he put it out. They live stream every night on their newscast, and he shared our flier in Bengali and English. He offered an email address, the phone number, a link to us. And suddenly I started getting dozens and dozens of Bangladeshi taxi drivers reaching out, asking for help with vaccines. And his network goes all over the world. But I think it's important that it had to go all over the world for me to find Bangladeshis that don't know about Epicenter as a newsletter just living blocks away from me. The Haitian Times also has shared some of our stories and shared kind of how we've approached it in the process of us highlighting certain pharmacies and places to get vaccinated. We heard of a pair of Haitian pharmacists who've been trying to help their community. I called Macollvie, who you'll hear from later, and said, "Would you guys do a story on this?" And of course, they did a story on this. Documented has been grappling with many of the immigrants who are showing up at vaccine sites and being turned away because they don't have effective documentation. Their freelancer called me and asked for help getting some of their users on the path to getting vaccinated. And the last example I'll mention is we got a call from Maryland saying there is a group of women in the Latino community who are doing something very similar to you. And so I called our partners at Palabra and I said, "Is this a story?" And so they ended up doing a pretty long piece and a video on this initiative. And so none of this is accidental. And yet you can kind of see the power of a network, and I didn't feel like I lost anything. If anything, think of how much we all gained by being able to tap into one media outlet that's pretty small in our efforts around just vaccines. And I do think that model is certainly applicable to lots of other areas going forward.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** So now we're going to introduce some of our partners, and the first one is Nancy San Martin. She is a journalist and a contributor to Palabra, and we're going to hear from you. Hi, Nancy. We're going to hear about the work at Palabra, and how Palabra is speaking into this question of race and equity in the news and how we're serving our communities in very unique and special ways.

**Nancy San Martin** Well, great. Thanks. Thanks for having me. I'm happy to be part of this very important discussion. So I will start by saying that the issue of diversity, equity and inclusion is not a new issue. Right. We've all been struggling with that for all of our careers, I would guess. And I think what is new is what I would call a growing movement to actually do something about it. At NAHJ, we've been fighting for fair and accurate representation of our communities over the past three decades. And Palabra actually emerged as an idea for how do we help broaden the voices and represent the communities that we serve, particularly at a time when the industry has been in such turmoil in terms of its own framework. Right. And we saw so many layoffs, and mergers, and closures, and of course, that affected a lot of our own members, and journalists, and particularly the up-and-coming journalists in many newsrooms were the first to go. So Palabra was actually the idea of our executive director, Alberto Mendoza, to provide a platform that would serve freelancers so that they could actually do journalism and get paid for it. And so it kicked off, we're fairly young, in 2019, and it's growing in terms of the number of contributors. I myself have

contributed a couple of stories and having come up the ranks as a reporter, and then an editor, then a manager, I got to say that going back to the basics of writing was pure joy. And I think that the kind of stories that we're offering are very representative of the communities. It's not just about the immigration issue, which is what you often see represented when it comes to mainstream media, but also about profiles of people who are doing great things, or communities in need for whatever reason, activism, volunteer groups that are doing X, Y or Z. These are the kinds of stories that Palabra is doing in various formats. And we're also obviously multiplatform with the video and the visuals.

The other thing I would like to highlight is the fact that we recognize the importance of a community that is bilingual, so we don't speak one language. We speak Spanglish. And you will see that some of the stories are in Spanish as well. And that's often not the result of a translation, but rather it comes from writers who write in Spanish. And so that also is something that I would say is unique in terms of providing a platform for our Spanish-language journalists. The other thing I wanted to mention was the issue that you touched on is the issue of money. Right. At the end of the day, even though we are non-profit, I think what is happening with the various efforts is showcasing the fact that the communities that we serve also represent a smart business opportunity. In the case of the Hispanic population, we know that it's a growing population. You look at the Census, it's an emerging majority. So we have to tap into that audience. We have to represent those communities that we serve. Otherwise they won't be our customers. I mean, that's the simple business model. If you don't provide a service, they'll go elsewhere. And so recognizing that that, too, is an important factor. I applaud the efforts of my colleagues on this panel for recognizing that and serving that purpose as well. I don't have a heck of a lot more to say because I really do want to provide plenty of space here for dialog, so I'm going to end with that and pass it back to our moderator.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Great, thank you. Thank you, Nancy. That's awesome. We're so excited to have Palabra as a part of the URL media network because they are connecting so authentically with the Latino community and also empowering journalists, journalists of color. So that's amazing. Next up is Cierra Hinton, and Cierra is the executive director and publisher of Scalawag. And Scalawag is, well Cierra is going to describe exactly what Scalawag is, but I think the way she's described it to me is it's a movement journalism platform and news organization that is covering the South. So we are excited that Scalawag is a part of the URL media network. And tell us, Cierra, what this notion of race and equity in the news means to y'all in the South?

**Cierra Hinton** Thanks, Sara. Race, equity, and journalism in service of community is core to my work and the work of Scalawag, and I'm just so grateful to be a part of today's conversation and to be a member of the URL Network. Engagement journalism, solutions journalism, movement journalism. There are just so many ways that we've come to talk about journalism that centers communities, especially communities that have been, and continue to be harmed, erased, or otherwise overlooked by this industry. Though a true racial reckoning has not come to news yet, more and more journalists are rejecting objectivity and other tenets of white dominant culture that keep us from being in relationship with and serving all people. The moving away from business as usual and the rise of projects like URL, Press On, Media 2070, and newsrooms like MLK50, Outlier Media, and of course, our fellow URL network members is where I find hope. I also find an immense hope in the transformation that my organization has undergone and the lessons that we've learned along the way.

Scalawag, as folks might know, began as a white-led quarterly print magazine with a subscription model. Today, we are a membership-driven digital-first Black, queer and woman-led journalism and storytelling organization that works in solidarity with oppressed communities in the South to disrupt and shift the narratives that keep power and wealth in the hands of the few as we collectively pursue liberation. But we didn't get here overnight. There are many decisions and critical points in our organizational development that we can point to that led us to this current iteration of Scalawag. But I just wanted to share three of the biggest pivots that got us here that I feel like other folks can learn from and implement in their own newsrooms, bring them closer to serving community, especially communities of color.

I want to start with Black and queer leadership. There's a long history in this country of transformational change coming from the leadership of Black and queer people. Scalawag is no exception. And that's because those of us on the margins have a fuller understanding of what it will take to ensure that everyone is included, and more importantly, everyone is free. The most marginalized person has everything that they need to live a whole, safe, liberated life. That, to me, is a meaningful, actionable definition of equity. I have no doubt in my mind that when marginalized folks are given the resources and space to lead, we will see a shift in how this industry relates to oppressed people and communities. The next thing that I would highlight is discontinuing our print product. When Scalawag did an audience survey in 2018, we discovered that our audience was overwhelmingly white and that it skewed older. For as much as we loved it, the product that we were creating, a quarterly print magazine full of long reads, did not match the lives and habits of the audience we wanted to reach. Just as important, we couldn't even track the impact of the product we were creating, and we had no way of knowing if it was serving the people and communities we wanted to serve. So we killed it and freed up space and resources to produce products that we can not only track the impact of, but that center and target communities of color and oppressed communities from the very beginning. Lastly, we got really intentional about building relationships with community. The first step of our theory of change is right relationship. When we say right relationship, we mean we are in generative, reciprocal relationship with community, organizers, and movements. Our community trusts us to share stories, their stories, and as a source of information because of the relationships that we've built with them. We build relationships through our work with community contributors by amplifying and being in relationship with community and movement organizers and through our virtual and in-person events. And of course, also through community driven reporting. No matter how you do it or what you call it, relationship building and community engagement must be foundational and an ongoing part of our work as journalists. At Scalawag, we look forward to a Black, or brown, or more equitable future for this industry and what that will mean for communities of color in the South and beyond. And we're really grateful to be able to do this work with y'all and to be a part of this conversation. Thank you.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Great, thanks, Cierra. We are happy to be in business with you and the Scalawag team as part of URL. You guys are doing amazing work always. And our final URL partner represented today in this conversation is Macollvie Neel, and Macollvie is the managing editor of The Haitian Times. Hey, Macollvie, how are you? We're excited to hear about the amazing work that you guys are doing at The Haitian Times, and speak into this question of race and equity. and how you're doing your journalism in service to your community.

**Macollvie J. Neel** Thank you so much for having me. This panel is just exceptional, and I commend you and Mitra for really making URL come to life. In many ways, our relationship

with URL is really just sort of formalizing of the ways we've been working overtime since inception, 20 years ago at the Haitian Times. And so I'm just really grateful to be able to tap into all of the resources that you've made available and all of the partnerships and relationships we've been able to build just in the past several months. It's really amazing.

So just to step back a little bit and share just some some basic information about The Haitian Times. It was founded back in 1999, by former New York Times reporter Garry Pierre-Pierre, the original publisher, and he left it to be able to speak to the issues and experiences that Haitian-Americans like himself were experiencing across this country. Right. So we started off as a print publication based in Brooklyn. And the reception that it got right in its founding was just incredible. I myself remember coming across the hard copy of The Haitian Times back in like 2001, or something like that. I was in college getting ready to graduate and getting ready to have my bachelor's in journalism. And I just came across this publication that had The Haitian Times scroll at the top. And the immediate feeling I had at the time being 20 or 21, however old I was, was really just moment of pride, like quiet pride, to be able to say, "Oh my God, we have our own newspaper." I had no idea. Being born in Haiti raised in Brooklyn, a lot of times as an immigrant, you stick to your little community in your pocket wherever you are. And so having a window to what the rest of the Haitians in New York, in Florida and Boston were doing was just an amazing feeling. And so that's how I ended up joining The Haitian Times and kicking off my career there straight out of college. Along the way, I left for a while, went into mainstream news publications, worked there. I also moved into the corporate space to do corporate communications. And meanwhile, on a parallel track, The Haitian Times continued to evolve, and it turned into a digital publication in 2012, solely digital. So over those last 15 to 17 years, we've seen the Haitian population grow to 1.1 million people across the U.S. alone, and there are just so many more across the world. And so what we do is try to tell stories of assimilation, acculturation, that our community goes through across this country.

And the way that we do that is by making sure that we practice quality journalism where we are unique in the way that we tell those stories of our unique diaspora. And some of the reasons we're unique, as you may know, is because Haiti is primarily Creole speaking with some people who speak French and whatnot. So our language automatically sets us apart from a lot of immigrant groups that may be coming from the Caribbean. And so being able to tell our stories, being able to tell the stories of Haiti, not just from what you see in the headlines, but trying to go beyond the headlines to add nuance and authenticity and hearing more from the Haitians who are experiencing these stories is really how we have a lot of impact in terms of uplifting our voices and making sure that our experiences are told from our point of view instead of other people reporting from the outside. In doing that, we've had the opportunity to make a lot of connections with people who are serving the community as community-based organizations, clergy, health care workers. All of these folks that we need to be able to tell the stories also need us to be able to share information about what's going on with their groups, and so it's always been a bit of a symbiotic relationship because you really need each other to be able to tell these stories in an authentic, rich way. And part of that is actually becoming a resource for the community, where they come to you to ask you what's going on. A lot of times resources and services that may be available to people just aren't easily discoverable. Right. So who do they turn to? They turn to the families and friends that they know. And they might call up The Haitian Times to find out, "Hey, I need a Haitian actor for my movie. Do you know anyone? I need Haitian doctors to be part of this group we're putting together to address health inequities in the city. Do you know anyone?" Right. And so trying to help people navigate both within the community, educating them, helping them understand what's out there, what's available to them is one way we have impact. The other way is by being a resource for



people outside of the community who want to work with us and understand things from a more contextual perspective.

I would say the third piece that really defines our coverage in The Haitian Times is how we are, what we think of, as the conscience of the community. Because at the same time, we're really keen on uplifting our voices and making sure we're heard and that we do have representation. That we have a record of what our lives have been like or are like as Haitian-Americans in the U.S. At the same time, being reporters and journalists, you can't let people get away with whatever. Right. That's part of the idea of holding people's feet to the fire, accountability journalism, solutions journalism, whatever it's called. So it's part of being a conscience of the community, making sure the officials who are elected, whether they're Haitian or not, are held to task for what it is they're responsible for providing to the community, and then likewise calling out members of the community themselves when they're doing things that may be a little bit irresponsible. Things like holding parties in the middle of COVID and not really following social distancing guidelines and all of that.

So to bring it all together and to end, I would say when I think about URL, the words that come to mind are for "uplift," making sure you're educating your community, both your own community and the communities that you, as Haitian-Americans in my example, are interacting with. Right. It's a two way. You're like the middle person providing education to all these groups. The second piece, I would say in terms of "respect." The R in your URL. I think it's respecting the cultures that you cover, and that culture isn't just the ethnic part of your community. This is language, race, ethnicity, all of it matters. But I think respecting the culture of, say, the local government that services your community, the schools, the hospitals, understanding how things work and understanding how it could work for you and your community, or being able to understand, like where there are gaps we try to help solve the problem, I think is really important. So approaching things from the the lens of going into the story and respecting where this person is coming from and what they're doing and allow them the space to share with me what they have so I can know how to represent it for my community. And then in terms of love, the last letter in URL, I think you really have to have a genuine affection for your community to be successful. You know, thinking of the community as just this mass of people that don't have faces just really doesn't work. So in every story that I edit, certainly, I try to make sure that I have a face tied to that story. Right. I think about my own brothers and sisters. I have six of them, so there's a lot. And I try to imagine how this might impact them, and what they're going through in their lives. Right. I try to think about my cousins, my mom, my sisters, like everyone that I might know to see how they may be experiencing what's happening. So Mitra earlier, for example, talked about being able to share information about the vaccine sites. That was a huge problem. It took like like two months, three months, two and a half months to get just an appointment for a vaccination in Flatbush, Brooklyn, one of the hardest hit areas of the pandemic. That should not have been the case. And so being able to share, and partner, and collaborate with people like Mitra, like Epicenter, URL, I think really is a demonstration of the love you have for that community because you're showing the willingness to go out there and just bring this information to them.

And lastly, from a business aspect, I would say The Haitian Times did start out as a print publication serving primarily Haitian-American, English-speaking residents of the US. But now, as we've seen with what's happened in the past year, with the racial reckoning that this country is going through, we knew it was happening, and we had covered these issues over time, obviously. But we've really seen a huge opportunity to take advantage of the fact that the powers that be institutions, foundations are listening, and they're willing to provide support. And so we see things like the Google News Initiative coming out. The

Facebook Accelerator. All of these giant conglomerates, these media entities, who are looking for our content and our ways of approaching those stories to do business. I think for us that presents an opportunity to say, "OK, how can we serve some of the members of our community that we weren't able to before because of a lack of resources." And so what we're looking at doing now for the next iteration of The Haitian Times, like our ongoing evolution, would be to expand our audience, try to service the people who are Creole speaking, a lot of them older, who aren't able to consume information in English, and also to make sure that the younger generation coming up, the third- and fourth-generation Haitian Americans at this point, are able to still have a publication that they can point to and say, "Yes, I'm Haitian-American. This is my community, and The Haitian Times is one way that I demonstrate that."

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Thanks so much, Macollvie. That was great to learn more about the amazing work that The Haitian Times is doing. We're going to get ready to open it up to questions. I just want to underscore that even though everyone made it sound kind of easy, this is really hard work. To do this kind of community-based journalism that really centers your communities at the heart is not easy to do on a day-to-day basis, to make it work financially, from a business standpoint. But we are excited that we have assembled this incredible network of organizations that are doing the work so well. And our goal with URL is just to amplify that work and help to create additional revenue generating opportunities so that they can continue to grow, expand, and elevate.

Hi, everybody. So we're going to get ready to open everything up to questions. We have quite a few questions from the audience. But before we go to the audience, now that we're here live, we actually taped that presentation before the Derek Chauvin verdict was delivered, and that was a major historic occurrence. And so it definitely speaks into this question of race and equity in the news. And so I wanted to ask one question, and any of you can answer it before we go to the questions. But we talked a lot. Each person who spoke in the video talked a lot about nuance, and authenticity, and connectivity, and trust with our audiences. And I wanted to get from you all how you feel your outlets have covered the Derek Chauvin verdict? But also we know that there have been multiple police killings since that verdict, whether it's Ma'Khia Bryant, or Adam Toledo, or Andrew Brown. And I'm just curious, and maybe I'll point it to you, Cierra, because I know there's a lot going on right now in North Carolina around this this killing of Andrew Brown. And I just want to know, what do you feel like, Scalawag or your outlet is bringing to this conversation that's unique and different based on being independent, community based, and really audience centered?

**Cierra Hinton** Yeah, thanks, Sara. So we don't do breaking news. We don't publish every day, and we really try to focus on personal narrative stories that are happening on the ground, but we really try to focus on systemic issues. So when we are talking about police killings, when we're talking about police brutality, when we're talking about protests, we are talking about that through the lens of what is happening across movements, whether it's the movement to abolish the carceral state, or if it is like the movement to make sure that people of color are centered in media and our stories are centered, or whether we're talking about the injustice and the ways in which, like women, particularly Black women, are often overlooked or otherwise their murders are not given the same type of coverage that we see with other police killings. So for us, it really is just this focus on bringing to light the larger systemic issues that are behind this and to remind folks like this is not just this moment. This is also connected to slavery. This is connected to so many movements that have happened before this point, so that folks really have that understanding, and that grounding, and that deep historical context, and can begin to unpack not only how this

moment is connected to past moments, but also how all of these systems of oppression are connected and continue to keep Black and brown folks in particular, but really all of us oppressed.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Does anyone else want to speak into that before we go to the audience questions?

**Mitra Kalita** I'll just say one thing, Sara, and this is actually partly a URL media initiative, but Epicenter has been chronicling the mayoral election here in New York City. And in the wake of the Derek Chauvin verdict, I do think even how voters will want a law and order candidate, as it's often called, feels like it's changing on a pretty regular basis. So we've leaned into that. Our reporter working on that had the first part of a two-part series on what law enforcement means to New York City voters and goes a little bit deeper. To your point about all of us talking about nuance and authenticity, it feels like there's sort of this broad brush of the law and order candidate and the progressive candidate, and he just dived into some themes within that. And then just within the Asian community around stop Asian hate, I think it's been really intriguing to see that there's actually nuance in that debate where it's not instantly, "Oh, we need more policing in order to combat hate crimes." And I think this is actually good news for a change. I'm definitely seeing and embracing within my own outlet a desire for nuance around these issues as opposed to kind of the typical binary we see on how we cover elections.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Yeah, absolutely. Macollvie or Nancy, either one of you want to say anything?

**Macollvie J. Neel** I'll just jump in and say that in addition to obviously reporting on the actual verdict and getting community reactions, because of where we are in New York, we were able to actually follow people who had made plans to gather at a particular train station to just react whether the verdict was guilty or not guilty. Right. And Haitians, being Haitians, were always everywhere with our flag and our drums, so I knew that would be something to shoot. And so we immediately sent reporters over there. But I think one of the even more authentic pieces that we ran was about how throughout this whole time, there's a group of Black psychologists who've been helping people process all of this information, starting with COVID, through all the protests, and all of the courtroom drama that happened, because people need that outlet to be able to take care of their mental health. And so that's what we're trying to offer from a position of a solution or something else that's happening that is very important, that may not get the information that needs at any point. When you have moments like this where there's a big verdict and you know people are going to be attuned, it just made sense to also offer that as a contribution to remind people that this isn't just something that happens today and disappears. People in our communities are constantly, daily, going through the motions and processing them.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Yeah, absolutely. Nancy, anything you want to weigh in on?

**Nancy San Martin** No. I mean, for Palabra, obviously, it's not a daily publication as well. So our efforts are really in terms of elevating perspectives, providing the perspectives and those voices not only for this issue, but for other issues. So in terms of breaking news, we, too, also don't really have the capacity to do that. But we always do try to find the voices who can offer the readers a different view with authenticity.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Excellent. I know for us at WURD in Philadelphia, it's a Black talk radio station, and we really, similar to what Macollvie was saying, we were really

intentional about making sure that our team, our staff, our hosts, our media team were taking care of themselves because this is a lot. And so kind of with that same theme of URL, uplift, respect, and love. We have to uplift, and respect, and love ourselves as well, because this is really grueling work. When you're not just talking about it, you are also living it in many ways. And so we were definitely trying to be very intentional on the mental health care side of things as well, both for our community but also for our team.

So I'm going to open it up to some questions, and I'll just go right from from the top. So one question wanted to see if me or Mitra could speak, or one of the speakers, could discuss how network effects may work differently globally than in the U.S., where a minority of white conservatives often seem to rule? Mitra, I'm going to let you address that. What is the difference in terms of how a network would be constructed here in the States versus how it would look globally, since the racial dynamics would likely be very different?

**Mitra Kalita** I think we see certainly evidence of this, and there's a few strands from that question that I'll pick up on. And when you say network, I wasn't sure if you meant media network, or information network, or journalistic network. So some of what I say is kind of lumping them together, admittedly, just so you know that I'm aware I'm doing that. So I think some of the forces are actually very similar. My background is my parents are Indian immigrants. I've worked overseas in India. I was raised partly in Puerto Rico for my childhood. And so I do tend to have a global view of coverage. And I'm on many, many WhatsApp groups where the spread of misinformation is quite rampant. And so the same forces, at least that I've seen of white nationalism in the U.S. are certainly evident overseas. One of the challenges, as in the U.S., is that they're often aligned with authoritarian governments. I would say an even greater challenge overseas, and you saw this this week with India and its reaction to COVID, is that the platforms have censored some of the criticism of the government and its COVID response. And so, what ends up happening is that on the platforms, which largely we've viewed platforms as attempts to democratize information, you're only getting one lens of information. And if you think about what we're seeing and what the U.S. is seeing from India, which is a government in collapse, a health care system in collapse, there is great fear over those voices in their totality not rising and being shared, literally shared on feed. One other thing I'll just mention, and if you have a follow up to this, feel free to reach out, because I'm hoping I'm addressing the gist of the question. Right. Epicenter hosted a live stream with one of our URL partners earlier in the week, ScrollStack, and we actually had representatives from India, Peru and Brazil on. And I share that because vaccine distribution, which the whole URL network has really gotten behind, and you've already heard I couldn't have done anything at Epicenter without that network, has really become a global inequity issue. And so what was fascinating, hearing these three countries and their perspectives was the role of the networks you're describing and fringe groups within that are destabilizing when it comes to misinformation. Each of them have governments kind of in flux. In the case of Peru and India, both dealing with elections, and how that's going to affect their response. And so what happens when countries are destabilized, whether it's governments, or COVID, or in the case of the ones I just mentioned, all of the above, these factions kind of see this as an opportunity to insert themselves and create even further destabilization. And whether that's misinformation around science and the vaccines, or if it's just the desperation with people trying to make these life or death decisions, all three countries mentioned that as a significant concern.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Great, great, I'm going to take the next question. She said, "really great panel." That's not the question, but thank you. "I just wanted to know, what are your

recommendations for learning about and tapping the subjects and needs that really matter to the community you are covering?" I'm going to ask you, Cierra, to take that one.

**Cierra Hinton** Yeah, so my greatest recommendation is to talk with people. I know that probably seems simple, but it's not. There's been a really big erosion of trust between media and people in communities. And so being able to have a conversation with folks is not always as easy as we would like it to be. And so with that recommendation, I say like showing up in a community and showing up to spaces without an ask and without a need, over and over again, and really building deep, meaningful relationships. So you can do this through events both virtual and when it's safe in person. You can do this through forming partnerships with community organizations and folks within the community who already have built that trust and are willing to work with you to get you introduced to folks and get folks comfortable with you and the work that you're doing. And you can partner, not only community organizations, but other media organizations that have already started to do this work as well. But that's what I would say. It always begins and ends with relationship building and really getting to know folks before you need them as a source for your stories.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Does anyone else want to address that?

**Macollvie J. Neel** Well, I would just add that, yes, definitely find the specific space, or a place that you go to often, and become like the place where people can find you, even. If it's possible, physically now, with COVID vaccinations actually taking root and things reopening. The other thing I would say is because a lot of our publications cover communities that do not speak English as their primary language, don't let the language piece be a barrier, right? Don't let the fact that you don't speak Haitian Creole, or Urdu, or whatever it is be the reason that you shy away from engaging with people because most of communication isn't verbal anyway. It's really in your approach, your demeanor, and you know how you come at people, so to speak. So if language is a barrier, like figure out a way to get over that, even if it's by learning each other's words, like initial basic phrases to communicate. But there's a lot more that can be said and shared without you having to be fluent in a particular language. So that's what I would add, is to not be shy about approaching groups that don't speak your language, because then you're just further perpetuating their stories not being able to get out there. So you have to make that extra effort and just go for it.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Excellent. Thank you. This one is for you, Nancy. It's very specific. Does Palabra have a video reporter component where freelancers can contribute?

**Nancy San Martin** The answer is yes. They are seeking to do more of that, and I would say that your contact for Palabra is the managing editor Ricardo Sandoval. So you can reach out to him, and I think the email ricardosandoval@nahj.org. I'll confirm that. But yes, we are looking to do more visual storytelling in the form of video. And I just wanted to add in the last question because I think it's important is that it's sometimes, often actually I found, it's more important to listen rather than asking questions. So wherever you're going to go, whatever forum you're going to participate on, spend a lot of time listening because you'll get a lot out of that experience.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Excellent. Excellent. Mitra, I'm coming to you. What role can networks like URL play in helping to recruit, encourage and train new journalists?

**Mitra Kalita** So URL is involved in all of those areas. I think we can break this down into two significant themes that I'm seeing. The first is the talent itself. And I think with all of us,

not just mainstream newsrooms, but all of us, even on this panel, who might have come of age in a certain way in a certain system need to look at is the ground is shifting beneath our feet. And what I'm hearing from young journalists, or even older journalists, is that they don't want to have to sacrifice themselves in order to commit journalism. And for long times now, we have kind of asked people to leave pieces of themselves at the door in order to engage in journalism. And we have a population that is saying, "No, we don't want to do that." Now as an industry, we need to look at our own future and say, "Are we willing really for people not to be a part of our industry because we ask so much in return? They almost neuter themselves or their feelings, their opinions, their communities in order to be a part of this." That's one big area that I'm increasingly hearing about. The second is newsrooms themselves. We are in a moment whether your newsroom is reopening, or you still don't know what's going on, are we going back to work, are we going to be in the newsroom as of July, September? Is it going to be remote for a little bit longer than that? I've heard different scenarios. There is a reset taking place on how we retain and recruit talent. I mentioned retention as well because for many folks who contact us asking for help with a search, the mind immediately goes to, we need this type of person. And if you talk to people of color in newsrooms right now, there is an erasure they're feeling of their skills. And, you know, they were there before George Floyd. And if suddenly you've woken up and gotten the diversity memo and yet had people in your newsroom for a long time that are not a part of that process or not a part of what you're contemplating, I can assure you that the new people coming in are not going to solve the problem that you have. And so I think retention is another theme that I'm encouraging newsrooms to look at. And then the final thing, which I think all of us represent, are just where are the nontraditional places that we hire? I mean, all of us, I think, are doing that. And I have folks at Epicenter who say, "Well, I love what you're doing, but I don't want to give up this other startup I have." And I said, "That's fine." Right. A part of people being themselves is not just their ethnic identity. It might be other passions and purposes that they want to fulfill. So those are significant changes in our industry, I think.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** So, I think we have time for maybe one more question and this one writes, "Thank you for this wonderful presentation. All of you serve an audience that has been both overlooked and harmed by mainstream media and philanthropy. Historically, philanthropy has been less enthusiastic about supporting Black- and brown-led media outlets that center communities and voices of historically marginalized people." Very true. "Do you see that changing? How do you compel funders to invest in this important and prolific work that informs but also forces a change in the way the broad mainstream media covers these communities?" That's a big question. Who wants to take a first bat? And so everybody can kind of answer this, but let's keep the answers kind of tight. I'll start with you, Cierra.

**Cierra Hinton** I would like to think that it is changing. I think that we have seen some evidence to support that in the last several months, and that is super exciting. My pause is around whether or not that will continue, whether or not this is actually just a moment in time, so folks can say that they did something. We will see. What I will just quickly add is that the other thing that I hope is that as philanthropy begins to invest more and more in newsrooms led by and serving people of color, that they don't try to shift those newsrooms to fit white standards of success, that they take time to actually understand how those newsrooms work, and how they function, and what their communities need, and that metrics and outcomes are aligned to that.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Excellent. Who wants to go next? I'll go with you, Nancy.

**Nancy San Martin** OK, so I would just say that the short answer is yes. I mean, I think that there is some change clearly from the funding that organizations such as Palabra are receiving from philanthropy. But what I wanted to add is that I agree that we want to make sure it's not a moment in time. So it really is up to us, all of us, to seize the moment. We can't accept it today and not demand it tomorrow. So it's incumbent on us to make the work as valuable as we can so that these institutions recognize why it's important.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Excellent. Macollvie?

**Macollvie J. Neel** Yeah, I think I'm optimistic about what we've been experiencing at The Haitian Times. Right now we're working with a group on what's called the Listening and Sustainability Lab. That's funded through the Racial Equity in Journalism Fund, and they're helping us think through what our site could look like, how we can expand our audiences, and serve them. And it's a longer-term relationship that's not just like here's a check and go do what you want with it. It's more of a partnership where we're getting great insights and support from people who already work with Black and brown organizations, who understand where we're coming from. So we can come to a point where the metrics, as Cierra said, makes sense for our community and the work that we do. So for that, I'm optimistic.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** And Mitra?

**Mitra Kalita** So I do want to hear your answer on this too, Sara, so I'll try to be brief. I think the funders have enormous power right now in forcing change of certainly mainstream institutions, and I think they should use that when it comes to many of the issues we've talked about. I worry about the dichotomy between how we are treated as founders of color, people of color, women of color. What I've noticed is that people might have money for us, but it requires, let's say, extra training, or mentorship, or so there's a lot of programs in addition to the money. And I understand that the money is trying to compensate for decades of inequity, but I don't see my white male counterparts having to go through extra boot camps to prove that they are worthy entrepreneurs. And so I would like to be taken seriously at the outset. I think that's just one area that funders can just check themselves a little bit on what is the way you're engaging with us versus my white male counterparts? Some of them are good friends of mine, I promise. That's why I know they don't have to go through the same things. And then the last thing I would say is that it's not just philanthropy. We need to demand accountability from a business environment, where the good businesses are supporting other good businesses. And we are a for-profit company at URL media. Epicenter is a for-profit company. We want advertising. We want banks and other companies that are trying to do the right thing by supporting us. It's not just charity. It's good business. And I think we want to get that narrative out too.

**Sara Lomax-Reese** Absolutely. So my response would be I am encouraged. I've never seen this. I've been a media entrepreneur in service of Black communities for 30 years, and I have never seen a moment like this before, where there is a collective acknowledgment that Black and brown media businesses, organizations need to be supported. And I've never heard serious conversations about reparations. Black people used to say, "Oh, we'll never get reparations. Stop talking about it." So this is a different moment, I think. However, I wasn't there, but I also know that reconstruction was a moment of deep awakening and opportunity for Black people after slavery in the late 1800s. And we saw what the backlash was, so this country toggles. It goes forward and back, forward and back. Obama and Trump. So we have a legacy of two steps forward, one step back. And so while I am encouraged, I also recognize that it is incumbent upon

all of us on this screen, all of the allies in the community, to keep the pressure on because there is deep, sustained work that has to happen because this country has a long-standing disdain for Black and brown people. I mean, just to call the thing a thing, and if you want to uplift, respect, and love the people, then the money and the support follows. But if you have disdain for the people, it's easy for the money to get get funny, to be reduced and reapplied some other way if you don't have love for the people. And in this country, we know that there is a lack of love for Black and brown people. And so it is our responsibility to show the business case, to show the audience size and capacity, and to just keep the pressure on funders, corporations, everyone, because it's not going to be given. We've got to take it. And I'll end there.

**Mallory Tenore** Great. Thank you all so, so much. This was really incredible, and I really appreciate your candor and just hearing about all the important work that you're each doing and that the URL Media network is doing for Black and brown media organizations and the communities they serve. I think mainstream media outlets could learn a lot from everything you said here, so I hope newsroom leaders, and funders, and others alike will watch the replay of this session and glean insights from it. So thank you so much, everyone.

To those of you in the audience, I want to remind you that this panel was streamed on to YouTube in English and Spanish, so you will be able to find a recording of it there on our ISOJ YouTube page. And right now, we have a little bit of a break. So we hope that you will take this time to join our Wonder room, where you can continue the conversation that this panel sparked, so you can meet with other ISOJ'ers and speakers in that Wonder room. And we'll post a link in the chat. And then you can also check out our Spotify playlist, which features some fun Austin tunes. So if you just need a little bit of a breather and want to listen to some music and relax, check out that playlist. You can do so there. And then our next panel is going to be our final panel of ISOJ, which is hard to believe. It is going to be our second research panel, and it's titled Challenging the Status Quo: New Pathways to Understanding News Audiences Today. So, again, that will be at 4:00 p.m. Central Standard Time, and we hope to see you there. Thank you.