

## Beyond Our Wildest Dreams

# Racial Equity Learning

### Reflection/Dialogue Questions

What are the stories being suggested by the way this information is presented?

Who are depicted as the villains, victims, or heroes?

What unspoken assumptions are being made?

What consequences or impacts could result from this frame?

Read (or paraphrase) the following passage to the group:

### How Media Images Reinforce Frames

You've heard the expressions that "every picture tells a story" and "a picture is worth a thousand words." These certainly ring true. Images bring stories to life and add faces to names, making them more human and compelling. Visual and emotional triggers are more powerful and memorable than analytical ones, such as facts and statistics. The human brain can process images much faster than it can process a lot of words. That's why many commercials and political ads—where meaning and messages must be conveyed very quickly—focus more on showing than on telling. Visual media—such as TV, YouTube, movies and billboards—have become so politically, culturally, and commercially powerful because they convey so vividly what we are, what we believe, and what we need.

Images can convey frames that we unconsciously absorb. Some of the news coverage in the wake of Hurricane Katrina illustrates this well. The two images and accompanying captions were posted by two popular news services on the same day. These two images are similar—people carrying things as they wade through the floodwaters. However, the captions are very different. The caption accompanying the photo of the dark-skinned person reads, "A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans..." While the caption next to the photo of the light-skinned people says, "Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store..." The simple images and single-sentence captions convey powerful frames or narratives about what is going on. These photos convey a dominant narrative: that white people are presumed to be good, helpful, law-abiding citizens, while people of color are presumed to be criminals and freeloading off the system. On the day these photos appeared in the news, people did not see both side by side. Whether you saw the photo of the African American person assumed to be "looting" or the white people presumed to be "finding" food, you would have been exposed to a highly racialized frame. Furthermore, you probably would have subconsciously absorbed the racism in this type of framing since it is so common.

**Please note:** You may use as much or as little that is presented here to move your conversation along, based on the depth of the conversation that has taken place. This could lead to a discussion about the consequences of racist frames, such as how the immediate response to Katrina focused largely on securing the city from looting, rather than providing relief to the people dying on rooftops and in the Superdome. If the city had been predominantly white people—and everyone was assumed to be heroically finding food to feed their families, rather than looting—it's likely that relief would have been prioritized over security. A similar dynamic took place in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, where much of the immediate aid efforts by the U.S. focused on securing Haiti rather than helping Haitians.