

# How to Communicate About Health Equity



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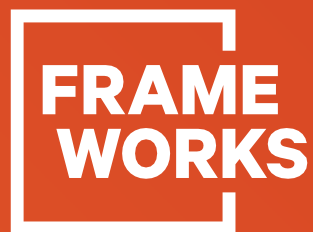


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# Talking about health equity

Julie Sweetland, PhD, Senior Advisor



March 26, 2025  
PHCC Insights to Practice

When the work gets harder, it gets more important, and more important to be strategic.



# 3 ways to refresh health equity framing

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Lead with the idea of dignity.

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Use “past-present-future” stories to motivate action to change uneven, unfair situations.

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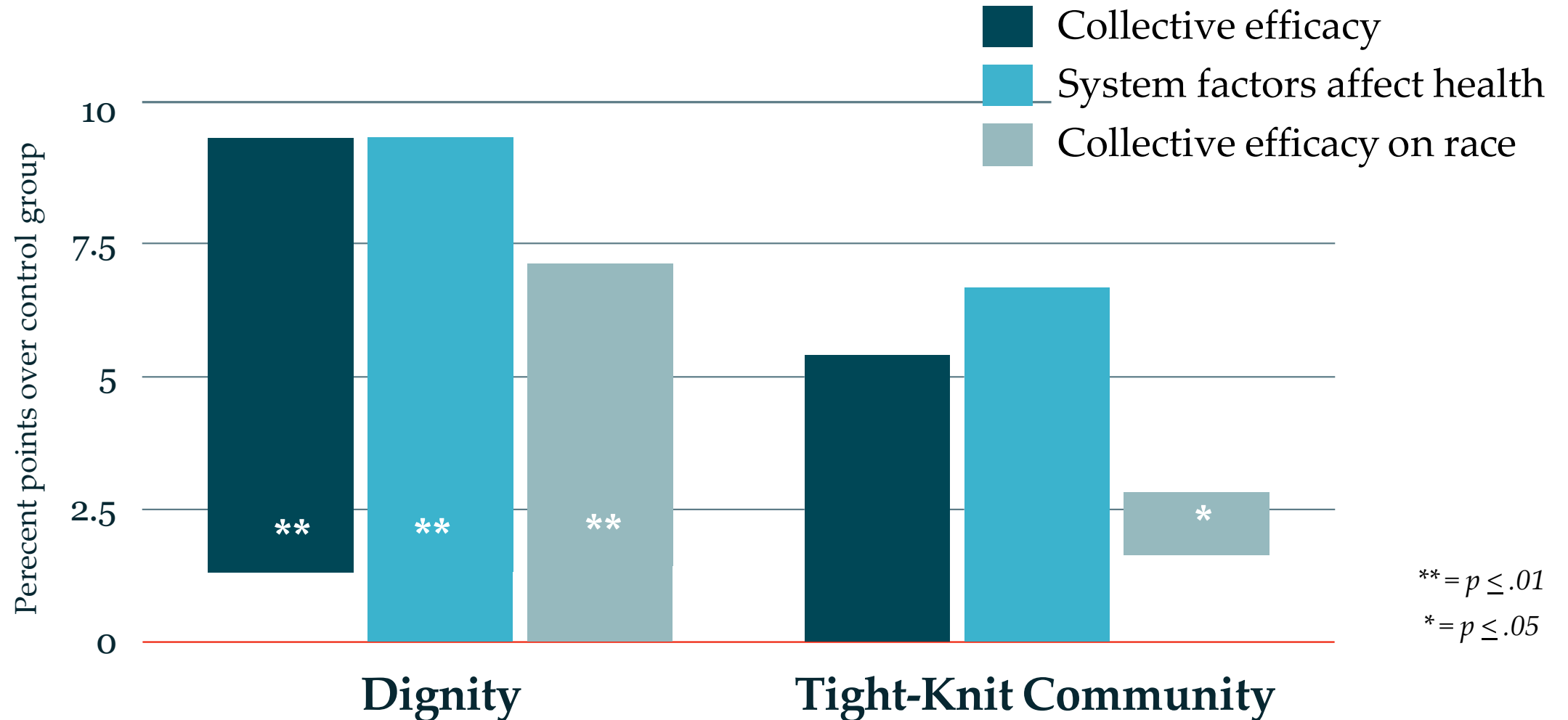
Consider talking about systemic racism as an example of how “the system is rigged.”

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Lead with the idea of dignity.

# Among values messages tested, Dignity worked best

*Selected results from a FrameWorks controlled survey experiment,  
rural sample, June 2023*



\*\* =  $p \leq .01$

\* =  $p \leq .05$



*“Every person and every community has innate dignity. Our choices as a society should honor this dignity and treat everyone with respect.”*

Use past-present-future policy stories.



# Frame health disparities in terms of past, present, future

## Past

**Speak to history.** Give specific examples of historical policies that help to explain contemporary health disparities.



## Present

**Connect the past to the present.** Show how the prior policy established conditions that help to explain health disparities now.

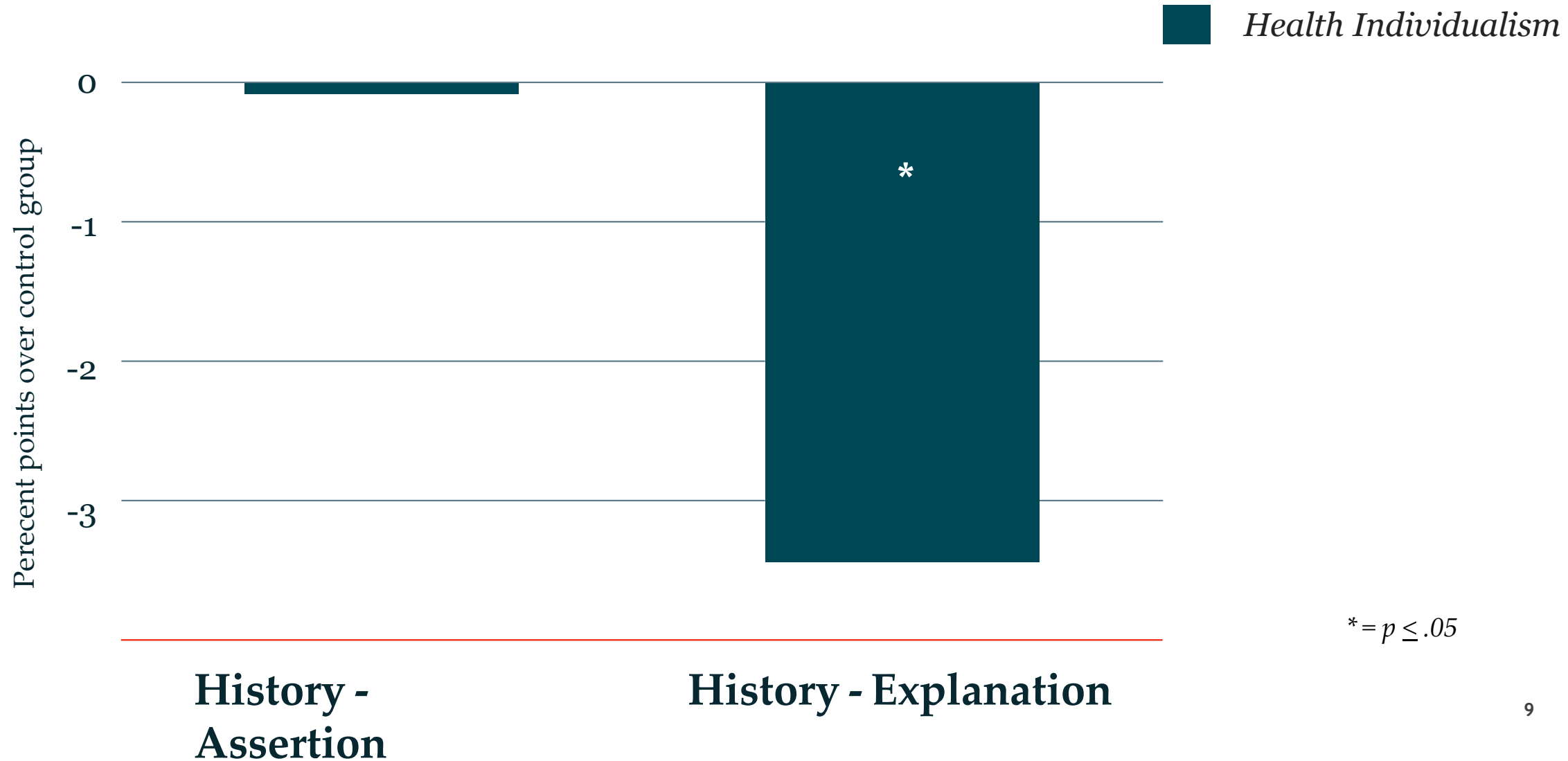


## Future

**Point to the future.** Offer an aspirational vision of the desired end state, showing what it could look like if we took action.

# Speaking to history reduced health individualism

*Selected results from a FrameWorks controlled survey experiment,  
national sample with rural oversample, December 2023*



## Assertion

Today's housing patterns continue to reflect past discriminatory policies, such as redlining, and leave communities of color people facing increased health risks and higher rates of health problems such as asthma, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Communities of color face a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards and reduced access to quality food, transportation, health care, and educational and employment opportunities. This legacy of racism contributes to significant health disparities, with communities of color experiencing higher rates of chronic diseases and lower life expectancy compared to their white counterparts.

## Explanation

In many US neighborhoods, most residents share the same race or ethnicity. Today's housing patterns reflect lines drawn on maps in the 1940s to keep Black residents in certain areas - a discriminatory federal policy known as "redlining."

This history matters because neighborhoods play a major role in health. Because highways, factories, and incinerators were often placed in majority-Black communities, residents now face higher pollution and other toxins, affecting people's lungs, hearts, and overall health.

# Putting it all together

In many US neighborhoods, most residents share the same race or ethnicity. Today's housing patterns reflect lines drawn on maps in the 1940s to keep Black residents in certain areas - a discriminatory federal policy known as "redlining."

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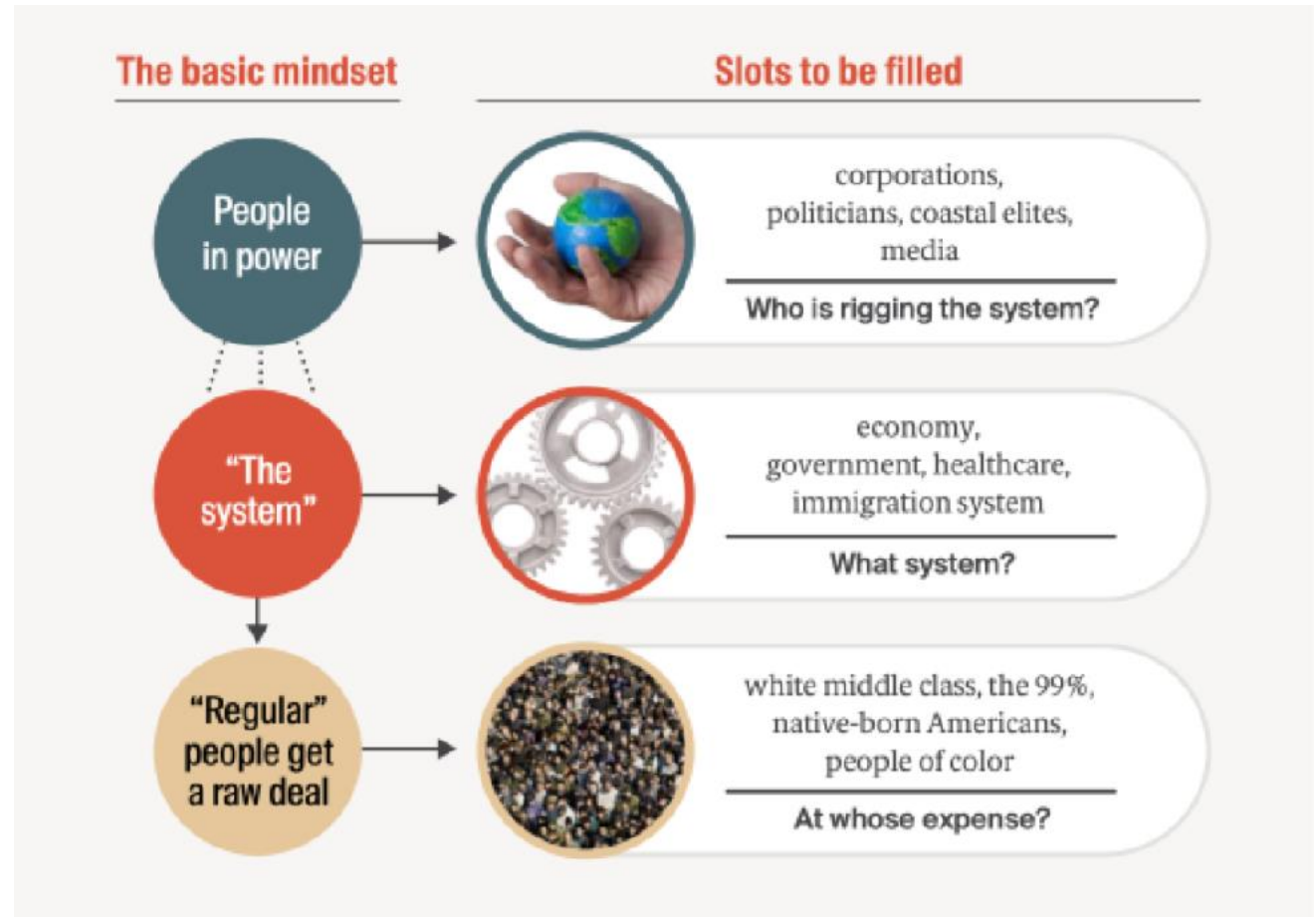
We have an opportunity to make the future brighter than our past. For instance, many formerly redlined communities are being revitalized through initiatives that draw on the knowledge of longtime residents. These work best when they include protections for lower-income residents, so they aren't priced out of their neighborhood as it improves. With approaches that look forward without ignoring our past, we can create vibrant, thoughtfully designed neighborhoods that allow people, families, and communities to flourish.

- Explanation of the historical policy that caused harm
- Explanation of how the past affects the present
- Example of contemporary corrective action
- "End state" framing to show a possible future

Consider talking about structural racism as an example of how “the system is rigged.”

“The system is rigged” mindset is strong and salient, but comes with “blanks” to fill in.

If voices for health equity don’t fill in the blanks, others will.



**We tested two different ways of talking about structural racism as an example of how “the system is rigged.”**



### **Racism “By Design”**

*“As a society, we believe no one has a natural right to rule over others. Yet our society is rigged, by design, to give wealthy white people power over Black, Native, and other people of color.”*



**Racism “As Violation of Our Values”**  
*“Wealthy white people are rigging the system, right now, to maintain power over Black, Native, and other people of color, violating the basic promises of our nation.”*

*Excerpts from frames tested in survey experiment.  
Please see full report for details and complete framing.*

**What we found – in just the past few months – suggests that talking about racism as a “rigged system” can move skeptical audiences.**

1. Explaining how racism rigs the system builds support for a more inclusive, multiracial society, especially among Republicans, who are less likely than Democrats to say this is a priority.
2. A message that explained racism as something that “twists our principles” was more effective with Republicans than one that asserted the system was “designed for the benefit of whites.” (Though both had positive effects.)
3. Republicans tended to say they “disagreed with” the messages, but other types of questions showed the messages changed their minds.



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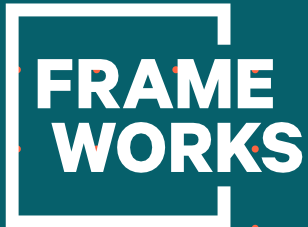
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*billy*

Thank you!  
Let's continue the  
conversation.



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# How to Communicate About Health Equity

PHCC Insights to Practice | March 25, 2025

Allyn Brooks-LaSure



Take bold leaps to transform health in our lifetime and pave the way, together, to a future where health is no longer a privilege, but a right.



**How do we have a  
meaningful conversation  
about structural racism  
and health?**

# Structural Racism Health Messaging Research

## Original Research 2022 - 2023

- Multidisciplinary team

## Updated 2024 - 2025

- Focus Groups Post-Election
- Quantitative Post Inauguration

# What We Know

## WHAT WORKS

- Lead with Values
- Describe before Naming
- Paint a Positive Vision for Everyone

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## WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Individualism
- Cynicism



**Together, we can  
build bridges free  
of barriers.**

<https://youtu.be/ilBmJjWXp4Q?si=MRtY-Nwzq3S2D6yT>

<https://youtu.be/ilBmJjWXp4Q?si=MRtY-Nwzq3S2D6yT>

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