

SMEAR-REVIEWED: a RESPONSE FROM THE ADOS ADVOCACY FOUNDATION TO HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL'S *DISINFORMATION CREEP*

At a time when our wealthiest colleges and universities ought to be reckoning with the distinct role that slavery played in creating and sustaining them, and working with Black communities outside of academia to secure racial justice, it is regrettable to see Harvard University using its institutional might to try and discredit and libel activists most committed to that cause.

The Harvard Kennedy School's *Misinformation Review*'s recent publication, "Disinformation creep: ADOS and the strategic weaponization of breaking news", is a clear attempt to use the Ivy League institution's esteemed name to legitimize an ongoing smear campaign directed at the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) movement. The report ascribes a familiar set of demonstrably false motivations to our political advocacy, with the authors frequently substituting subjective claims, innuendo, and outright lies for the sort of empirically-backed assertions one would expect to find in a publication from such a prestigious university.

Indeed, *Disinformation creep*'s own language highlights the authors' corrupt and biased approach: "The tweets in Figures 2-5," they write, "are examples of breaking news stories which led to a spike of activity within the ADOS network (which do not necessarily correspond to the overall spikes shown in Figure 1). *We then chose the ones that best illustrated the point we wanted to make*" (emphasis ours).

In other words, the authors acknowledge combing through the data and seeking to make their findings conform to a predetermined opinion of what the ADOS movement represents. Leaving aside the matter of how this method is the very antithesis of the kind of spirit that should animate and guide honest inquiry and investigation into a particular subject, the examples used by the report's authors do not actually bear out the "point [they] wanted to make". Instead, the authors' careless relationship to methodology and analysis frequently propels the material squarely into the terrain of libel.

We intend to enumerate the report's chief claims and supply evidence to the contrary that will lay bare the defamatory nature of the report. In so doing we will prove how, in an attempt to police the acceptable bounds of black political agency in America, it maliciously conveys false information to its audience.

We demand a formal apology from Harvard and that the publisher issue a full and timely retraction of this document. The retraction must appear in *Misinformation Review*'s next issue so its readers can gain a full understanding of the report's unsound scholarship and how the authors have baselessly vilified our movement and directly violated the journal's own stated mission of combating misinformation.

FROM THE REPORT: "ADOS IS AN ACRONYM FOR AMERICAN DESCENDANTS OF SLAVERY, A LARGELY ONLINE GROUP THAT OPERATES WITHIN BLACK ONLINE COMMUNITIES."

The first in *Disinformation creep*'s extensive list of factual errors is our organization being referred to as a "largely online group". This description ignores ADOS being registered as a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization with over 40 chapters currently in place nationwide. The officers of these chapters regularly confer with national leadership in order to ensure that their activities at the local level are best complementing the overall political project of the ADOS national

movement. Had anyone involved with *Disinformation creep* attempted to contact ADOS leadership prior to the report's publication, the organization would have gladly supplied them with a more precise understanding of what ADOS is and the scope of our political activities offline. No such effort however was made by the team of writers.

And so while the authors' idea of our presence being mainly online is useful for their argument that we exist primarily to propagandize breaking news events, it fails to honestly depict our members as what they are: committed activists who—from the Supreme Court, to the H.R.40 hearing—dependably show up in person to advocate for our group in particular and Black America more generally.

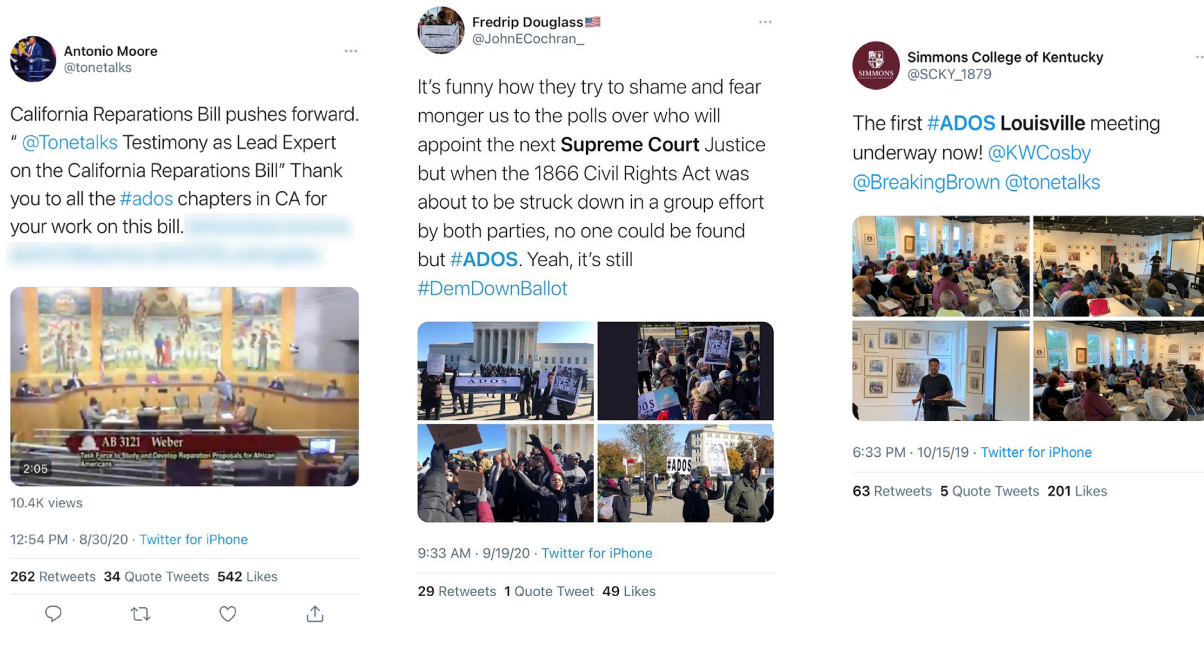


FIGURE 1. A collection of photos of ADOS leadership helping to pass historic legislation with CA's AB-3121, member advocating at the Supreme Court for the hearing of *Comcast v. National Association of African-American-Owned Media*, and organizing in their local community.

Although clearly false, the report relies on the idea of our movement as a predominantly online phenomenon in order to make its central claim of ADOS engaging in "disinformation creep". The authors coin this term to describe what they contend is ADOS leadership's method of taking to Twitter and

FROM THE REPORT: "WE FIND THAT THE ADOS NETWORK STRATEGICALLY USES BREAKING NEWS EVENTS TO DISCOURAGE BLACK VOTERS FROM VOTING FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, A PHENOMENON WE CALL DISINFORMATION CREEP."

"strategically leverag[ing] breaking news events that highlight the (very real) impacts of structural racism on and the failures of the federal government to support native-born Black Americans and us[ing] them as entry points to argue why native-born Black Americans should either not vote for the top of the Democratic ticket, or vote Republican, or (in the case of a related group, Foundational Black Americans) not vote at all in the 2020 presidential election."

We reject in the strongest terms possible the allegation that the ADOS organization has ever used breaking news to manipulate the Black community into voting Republican or, for that matter, abstaining entirely from the act of voting in the 2020 presidential election. And one will search the Harvard report in vain trying to locate a single piece of evidence that substantiates that claim.

Our organization's position has always been, and remains, that in order for a presidential candidate to earn our vote, he or she must produce policy that is attentive to our two-pronged agenda: our group's need to receive redress in the form of reparations for the particular experience of multigenerational oppression we have endured, and the rectification of the racialized barriers to access that prevent so many Black Americans from being able to participate in national life as full citizens.¹

In the absence of such a candidate, ADOS has consistently advocated voting down ballot Democrat on Election Day; that is, voting along the Democratic Party line below the President. This tactic is not, as the report's authors disingenuously suggest, a withdrawal from the electoral process and civic engagement; nor is it an approach that implicitly indicates support for the Republican Party. Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (someone who cannot realistically be described as being even remotely pro-GOP), similarly championed voting down ballot ahead of the 2016 election.² At the time, Glaude cited a lack of political will in either party to legislate with an eye toward meaningful justice for the damaging legacy of American chattel slavery. It is this same assessment that informs our

1. A full list of our policy proposals for black America is available on our website: <https://www.ados101.com/black-agenda>

2. "Eddie Glaude & Son: Leave Ballots Blank, Because Voting for the Status Quo Threatens Our Lives." Democracy Now!, 14 July 2011, www.democracynow.org/2016/7/14/eddie_glaude_son_leave_ballots_blank.

organization's initiative to have members leave the top of the ticket blank while concerning him or herself with races and ballot measures that are specific to that member's locale.

In this regard, ADOS has no relation whatsoever to Foundational Black Americans (FBA), a group that does in fact abstain from the voting process at all levels. And while the Harvard report identifies FBA as a group with whom we are "related", our website ados101.com (which does not appear among the report's source materials), expressly states in its disclaimer that we share no such affiliation. Indeed, that separation is in large part a direct consequence of our divergent views on the necessity of political engagement and voting in the ongoing struggle to achieve racial justice.



HOME ABOUT ADOS BLACK AGENDA ADOS101 – LEARN ABOUT THE MOVEMENT
ROADMAP TO REPARATIONS ABOUT FOUNDERS ADOS TEAMS

Disclaimer:



ADOS is a lineage, a burgeoning organization, and a political movement. We are fighting to secure reparations for our group, American Descendants of Slavery, while at the same time advocating for a Black Agenda that will benefit all Black Americans.

And while our movement consists of dozens of chapters and hundreds of volunteer community activists nationwide whose political work is unapologetically specific to Black Americans, we absolutely do not tolerate any bigotry or ill-will shown toward persons or groups on the basis of national origin, sexual orientation, gender expression, age, disability, religion, or race and ethnicity. Any serious examination of our political work, whether online or off, will attest to the fact that such attitudes have no place in our movement. Our focus is purely on policy. And, using the available data as a guide, we work in support of legislation that benefits Black America and in opposition to any legislation that works to its detriment.

Lastly, ADOS has no affiliation whatsoever with the groups B1 & Foundational Black Americans (FBA).



BreakingBrown (Yvette Carnell) @BreakingBrown

Don't. Listen. To. This. Man.
He's not smart. His strategy isn't smart.
Show up.
Even if you hate *EVERY* candidate,
there will *STILL* be judges, prosecutors,
sheriffs, ballot initiatives, & tax increases/
decreases that need ur **vote** 🗳️



Tariq Nasheed @tariqnash... · 1h
The smartest thing Foundational Black Americans can do this election cycle,

is STAY THE HELL HOME and NOT vote..

Don't let any of these non-FBA groups
SHAME you into voting when it helps
THEM but not YOU as a FBA

🗨️ 136 🔄 208 ❤️ 529 📌

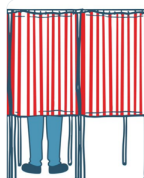
5:38 PM · 9/22/20 · Twitter for iPhone

136 Retweets 9 Quote Tweets 372 Likes



Antonio Moore @tonetalks

Try this site let's start pushing it to help
people get informed. ballotready.org
Put in your address then press ((Research
ballot to get information on all candidates
and propositions in your state.)) Check it
out.



Your ballot explained
ballotready.org

2:05 PM · 10/4/20 · Twitter for iPhone

180 Retweets 15 Quote Tweets 243 Likes

FIGURES 2, 3 & 4. The disclaimer on the ADOS101.com website disavowing any connection with Foundational Black Americans (FBA); ADOS co-founder Yvette Carnell critiquing FBA's strategy of electoral disengagement; ADOS co-founder Antonio Moore encouraging members to get registered and become informed about what's on their ballots

FROM THE REPORT: "IN CONTRAST TO THE CENTRALITY OF [CHADWICK] BOSEMAN'S PASSING IN THE LARGER BLACK CULTURAL CONVERSATION... HIS PASSING BARELY REGISTERED IN THE ADOS CONVERSATION."

While one might disagree with our down ballot Democrat initiative on strategic grounds, the Harvard report is decidedly not interested in arguing the merits of actual ideas. Rather, its authors seem interested only in attributing false and malicious motives to our movement's political advocacy.

Nowhere is this commitment to misrepresentation more apparent than in the report's claim that ADOS co-founder Antonio Moore "uses Black Panther [sic], an Oscar-nominated film in [sic] which took in over \$1 billion at the box office with [Chadwick] Boseman in the lead role, to double-down [sic] on ADOS's stance on reparations rather than express shock at Boseman's untimely passing."

ADOS leadership is here portrayed as without empathy and amoral in terms of what material they will use in order to amplify their assumed xenophobic agenda. But just because Antonio Moore's tweet did not conform to what the report's authors deem as being permissible discourse in the wake of a celebrity's passing, it does not mean that the ADOS organization is essentially insensitive and dismissive to the loss of Black cultural figures. In fact, both ADOS co-founders immediately published tweets expressing their sadness upon learning the news of Boseman's passing. Yvette Carnell's tweet received over 1,250 'likes', indicating a great deal of engagement among the ADOS network and clearly refuting the authors' suggestion that (taking a cue from ADOS leadership) the group was assuming a dispassionate stance on Boseman's untimely death.



FIGURES 5 & 6. ADOS co-founders tweet their condolences upon learning the news of Chadwick Boseman's death.

It seems, moreover, a flawed and irrelevant metric for the report's authors to rely solely on the "low number of #ADOS tweets on the day [Boseman] died" in order to justify their claim that the actor's death "barely registered in the ADOS conversation." After all, why would ADOS-affiliated accounts have to *necessarily* attach "#ADOS" in their expressions of grief concerning the actor's passing?

In seeking to prove their assertion, the report's authors should have adopted a more honest and intellectually rigorous model that looked at ADOS accounts *individually* and therein identified sorrow shown over Boseman's death (e.g. #ripchadwickboseman). This data sample would have encompassed a more robust and relevant set of tweets. And, as such, it would have offered a more reliable and precise picture for the authors to prove their claim that ADOS members demonstrated a callous and cruel commitment to pushing a xenophobic agenda during this moment of cultural loss. Instead, a deficient and biased model was created in order to cherry-pick data and make the authors' findings conform to their presupposition. This approach betrays a motive at odds with genuine academic inquiry and scholarship, and the report here (as elsewhere) appears more like an exercise in narrative production rather than an earnest look into correlation between two phenomena.



Among these false narratives promulgated by the report's authors, the most obscene and disgraceful is that the ADOS organization has demonstrated a "lack of concern" for the coronavirus's impact on Black Americans. According to the report, by remaining "largely silent" about COVID-19, ADOS is "undermining its claims that it works in the interest of Black Americans." However, from the outset of the virus, ADOS has been anything but silent on its impact on Black communities.

FROM THE REPORT: "WE BELIEVE THAT THE DISINGENUITY OF [ADOS] RHETORIC IS SHOWN BY THE LACK OF CONCERN WITH THE CONTINUING WAVE OF THE COVID CRISIS, WHICH IS DISPROPORTIONATELY DEVASTATING BLACK COMMUNITIES. "

On February 29, the U.S. reported its first official death as a result of the novel coronavirus. The previous day, ADOS co-founder Antonio Moore did a live broadcast on his YouTube channel where he discussed the disease itself and went through an exhaustive list of ways in which Black America could best prepare and stay safe. That video was subsequently picked up by *Eurweb*, a Black media outlet.

It is worth comparing ADOS leadership's early concern about the virus and its impact on Black America to that of Jessica Aiwuyor, someone who the Harvard report lists as one of its principal sources and who has published a number of defamatory articles and videos about the

ADOS movement over the last two years. The day before Antonio Moore published his coronavirus preparedness video to his 77,000 subscribers on YouTube, Aiwuyor wrote on Twitter: "News media is reporting that the coronavirus may spread throughout the U.S. So, I went to the CDC website to learn about prevention and they said, 'The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus'. They [are] providing the same instructions for avoiding the cold and flu. This ain't it."

In the sharp contrast between Antonio Moore's nearly hour-long informative video about COVID-19, and Jessica Aiwuyor's flippant dismissal of it, one sees just how specious is the claim of ADOS's indifference toward the potential impact of the virus on Black America. And given Aiwuyor's history of 'reporting' on ADOS while consistently omitting relevant facts and insinuating nefarious beliefs and motives to our political advocacy, the Harvard report's authors should have realized that including her as a source would naturally compromise whatever credibility they hoped to put forward in their so-called investigation. Aiwuyor was recently cited as a principal source in an article that appeared in the Associated Press characterizing ADOS as "Twitter trolls that often discourage Black voters from participating in elections". That article had to later be revised after AP Vice President and Managing Editor Brian Caroviano was contacted about Aiwuyor's grossly distorted and unproven statements about our movement.

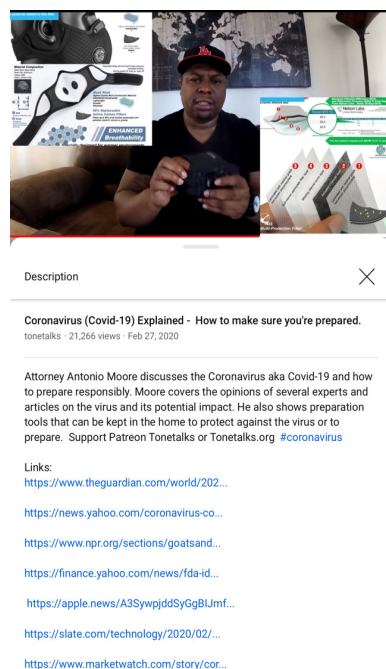


FIGURE 7. A comparison of coronavirus preparation between ADOS co-founder Antonio Moore and the Harvard Report source Jessica Aiwuyor.

Additionally, beginning on March 15, 2020, ADOS co-founder Yvette Carnell began curating a COVID-19-focused newsletter to send out to her tens of thousands of subscribers. The newsletter, which is sent out every Sunday, brought together coverage of the virus by international news outlets both minor and major. It was also during this time that Yvette Carnell made the newsletter free of charge in light of the economic hardships that Black Americans were facing because of the pandemic.

It should come as no surprise that the imperative of supplying the Black community with important, relevant material about the virus in order to keep them safe and informed outweighed any concerns over cost. The safety of the Black community during the pandemic has always been paramount for our organization. And while the Harvard report (again) erroneously sought to correlate our organization's supposed lack of concern about COVID-19 with hashtags like "#FBA", this approach only highlights how truly impoverished the authors' research and understanding of their topic is.

Citing the threat of COVID-19 infection posed by large gatherings, the ADOS co-founders made the decision to cancel the second annual ADOS conference. FBA, on the other hand (in direct contradiction to the advice of science and medical professionals) held their conference in September at the Georgia World Congress Center. This location is notable owing to the fact that the convention center had, just months prior, been converted into an overflow hospital for COVID-19 patients as the city was experiencing a dramatic surge in cases.³ Our organization was highly critical of the decision by FBA leadership to proceed with an event that would place members of the Black community in such imminent danger. However, none of this concern for the safety and well-being of our people managed to appear in the Harvard report. To have included it would have of course compromised the process that appears to have governed the authors' so-called study; namely, taking a select sample of tweets and using them to produce a predetermined result.



Hey Breaking Brown Family!

I'm distributing this newsletter to a wider audience just so we can share a bit more information about COVID-19, especially as it relates to impacts on ADOS life.

Pay particular attention to the first article, because it will probably be the topic of Monday's show.

If you missed my previous videos on the illness, click [here](#) and [here](#).

FIGURE 8. From Yvette Carnell's newsletter, which, when the pandemic hit, began concentrating on including multiple news stories highlighting the impact that the virus was having on black communities in America.

3. <https://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2020/07/31/georgia-covid-19-gwcc.html>



FIGURE 9. Amid growing concern over the threat of infection and the seriousness of COVID-19, ADOS leadership canceled the organization's second annual conference.

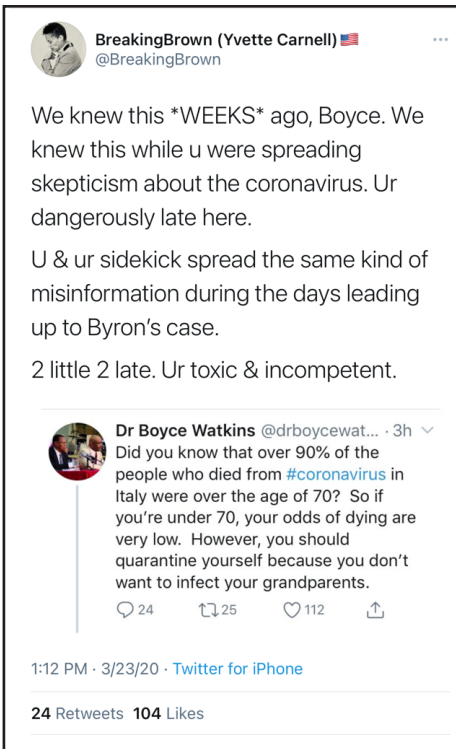


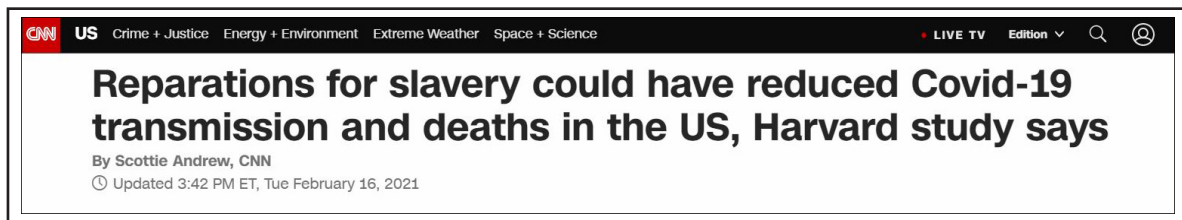
FIGURE 10. A series of tweets published by ADOS co-founder Yvette Carnell wherein she urges the black community to take COVID-19 seriously, and attempts to combat the misinformation about the virus.

Clearly, it is a lie to claim that ADOS has ever shown a "lack of concern" for Black America during the pandemic. And while the Harvard report falsely equates our down ballot initiative with being a rejection of "voting for...a platform of effective and equitable management of COVID-19 that will save Black lives and stem the economic hardship", Harvard itself recently released a report that supports the core aim of our down ballot position: securing reparations. That study highlighted how "[i]f the US had paid reparations the descendants of Black Americans who were enslaved...the risk of severe illness and death from the virus would be far lower".⁴

4. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/16/us/reparations-covid-black-americans-disparity-trnd/index.html>

And so the question is how does Harvard, in one report, vilify our efforts to secure a commitment to reparations for American Descendants of Slavery by claiming that in doing so we are supposedly being indifferent to the loss and suffering caused by COVID-19, while in a separate report demonstrating that reparations for slavery would have been the *singlemost important factor* in saving countless black American lives?

Our organization, in advocating a Democratic down ballot approach to voting during the pandemic, was not attempting to create what the Harvard report authors describe as an "information fog" that "undermine[s] the ability of a society to establish a factual reality". Quite oppositely, we were attempting to establish the urgency and absolute necessity of reparations and a black agenda as being *the* factual reality for black America in 2021. The pandemic has only amplified the exigency for repair in our community and dramatically hastened the need for us to demand a presidential candidate who recognizes it.



“HAD REPARATIONS BEEN INTRODUCED WELL BEFORE THE PANDEMIC AND LESSENED THE EQUITY GAP BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES, CORONAVIRUS TRANSMISSION IN LOUISIANA COULD’VE BEEN REDUCED BETWEEN **31%** AND **68%** FOR RESIDENTS OF ALL RACES.”

FIGURE 10. Findings about the public health implications of reparations from a study conducted by group of researchers from Harvard Medical School and the Lancet Commission on Reparations and Redistributive Justice.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the Harvard report reads more like an opinion paper than a scholarly journal article. By the authors' own admission our movement raises "legitimate...grievances about the failure of the Democratic party to adequately support one of its most loyal and critical voting blocs". They further note how our efforts to highlight the particularity of our experience of oppression relative to Black immigrants are "justified by legitimate statistics around how Black immigrants have much higher levels of wealth and educational achievement, as well as better health outcomes versus [ADOS], differences that can indeed be directly attributed to racial stress and intergenerational trauma that started in slavery and persists today."

Nonetheless, the Harvard report insists on casting the targeted political advocacy that emerges from these realities as duplicitous and nefarious. And despite the fact that we have consistently said that it is *only* reparations that is exclusive to our group—and despite the fact that we have developed a comprehensive Black Agenda in order to promote improved outcomes among Black immigrants—the authors accuse our organization of "narrowly advocating for the interests of native-born Black Americans alone" and failing to "address how systematic racism also lethally affects Black immigrants". These are outright lies, and the sort of mendacity on display in the Harvard report should be denounced by anyone who claims to value honesty in the presentation of information.

The question, of course, is why a journal that professes to elucidate its audience about misinformation has, in this case, opted to serve as a *purveyor* of deception. And in this regard we can only speculate. Indeed, to do otherwise—to pronounce upon the Harvard report's authors' aims without any real proof—would be to merely replicate the same corrupt model of 'analysis' they employed when defaming and libeling our organization.

However, it is difficult to ignore the financial contributions made by MoveOn with respect to the report and the direct involvement of multiple MoveOn staff members in its writing and production.⁵ As one of the wealthiest and most influential Political Action Committees in America whose work focuses on electing Democrats to presidential office, MoveOn arguably sees ADOS's

5. Of the Harvard report's ten authors, five are either staff members or are closely affiliated with MoveOn. Mary Drummer is a Campaign Manager, Natalie Martinez is a researcher, as is Ray Serrato. Momin M. Malik is a data scientist for MoveOn, and Ann Lewis their Chief Technology Officer. All of these individuals, the report notes, received salaries from MoveOn during the period of time related to the "academic project" of *Disinformation creep*. Three other writers—Mutale Nkonde, Joan K. Mukogosi, and Shakira King—were noted as having been given a "re-grant" by MoveOn.

agenda-driven political advocacy as a direct threat to its central mission. And with the relatively new Harvard Kennedy School *Misinformation Review*, MoveOn appears to have found a propaganda-friendly platform to carry out a dishonest delegitimization campaign against our movement.⁶ Indeed, *Misinformation Review*'s dramatically attenuated peer-review process (a "fast-reviewed" 1 month submission-publication timeline as opposed to the 6-8 month standard) promotes a model of scholarship that naturally de-emphasizes academic rigor in favor of disseminating information that may or may not be accurate. This process would seem rather convenient for an organization looking to give its libel a veneer of credibility, and we suspect that MoveOn sought to advantage the journal's markedly relaxed publication standards for precisely those ends.

We are confident that our response to *Disinformation creep* serves not only as a specific corrective to the report's numerous falsehoods, half-truths and innuendo about our movement, but also as a cautionary tale for subsequent publications of this sort in general. The broader implications of *Misinformation Review*'s guiding philosophy—one that values haste over honesty—should not be ignored or downplayed. Such a philosophy invites the very thing the journal was ostensibly founded to combat: the spread of lies that deform public perception and understanding.

It is worth considering the words of Harvard's former president, Drew G. Faust, who argued that the legacy of slavery "continues to shape [Harvard] in ways we should not try to erase or ignore", and that the institution "must do its part to undermine the legacies of race of slavery that continue to divide our nation".⁷ There can be no doubt, however, that with the publication of *Disinformation creep*, Harvard has acted in direct contradiction to Faust's noble directive. After all, how can a report that betrays such bad faith toward a pro-Black, pro-reparations movement not leave the institution open to charges of undermining efforts to combat the powerful and enduring influence of slavery? The first step in atoning for this grave public misservice must be an apology from Harvard University. And for that apology, along with a full retraction of the article by *Misinformation Review*, the ADOS Advocacy Foundation eagerly awaits.

6. The Harvard Kennedy School *Misinformation Review* was launched in January of 2020.

7. "Recognizing Slavery at Harvard." Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery, www.legacyofslavery.radcliffe.harvard.edu/ideas-news/recognizing-slavery-at-harvard. Accessed 21 Feb. 2021.