

POV Community Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE



LANDFALL

a film by Cecilia Aldarondo



LANDFALL

When Hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico in 2017 the US territory was already 72 billion dollars in debt. Two years later, record numbers of Puerto Ricans took to the streets to demand the resignation of Gov Ricardo Rossell. This is a portrait of what happened in between.

Through shard-like glimpses of everyday life in post-Hurricane María Puerto Rico, *LANDFALL* is a cautionary tale for our times. Set against the backdrop of protests that toppled the US colony's governor in 2019, the film offers a prismatic portrait of collective trauma and resistance. While the devastation of María attracted a great deal of media coverage, the world has paid far less attention to the storm that preceded it: a 72-billion-dollar debt crisis crippling Puerto Rico well before the winds and waters hit. *LANDFALL* examines the kinship of these two storms—one environmental, the other economic—juxtaposing competing utopian visions of recovery. Featuring intimate encounters with Puerto Ricans as well as the newcomers flooding the island, *LANDFALL* reflects on a question of contemporary global relevance: when the world falls apart, who do we become?

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The emotional tenor and structural narrative of *LANDFALL* is an act of listening and bearing witness to the unresolved pain of the people of Puerto Rico. An invitation towards remembrance, *LANDFALL* makes space for those directly impacted to share their grief, struggles, stories, resistance, and future visions. Following this approach, the *LANDFALL* discussion guide aims to support critical dialogues about concepts presented in the film. The guide prompts viewers to grapple with the various threads of Puerto Rico's colonial and economic history—and present context—that intersect in the aftermath of Hurricane María and the ousting of Governor Ricardo Rossell.

The guide includes reference sections that define useful terms, as well as detail key moments in the history of Puerto Rico that culminated in the debt crisis, hurricane devastation and popular uprisings. The guide offers a series of discussion questions along with customizable activities, adjustable to fit various group settings, designed to lead viewers in personal, creative, research and advocacy exercises and explorations. The guide concludes with further resources for viewers who seek more information and deeper research.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“We can’t deny that there is a before and after María.
But there is also a before and after the people’s victory.”

THE ART OF PLACEMAKING

1. LANDFALL is a placemaking film, with Puerto Rico starring as the central character. Through the film’s lens, what are the elements that personify the island? Why do you think the filmmaker chose this “shard-like” approach to reveal daily life in Puerto Rico post-Hurricane María?
2. Juxtapositions of environmental portraiture—the contrasting of two very different scenes—are important in the film. For example, one scene jumps from Orocovis, where Hurricane debris is cleared from the roof of a modest home, to the sterile aesthetics of a new luxury mansion in Dorado. What other visual juxtapositions did you notice presented in LANDFALL? How does the approach offer another layer of information to viewers?
3. As a group of friends break bread over a shared meal, one explains that the hurricane “took so much out of us. The process of recovery is so tiring. There hasn’t been time to think.” With this in mind, consider the filmmaking style. Many moments linger on wordless, meditative images of Puerto Rico, such as the long lobster catching scene. What do these moments evoke? What does this technique offer the viewer?



ENGAGE AND CREATE: PRACTICING CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

ARTPLACE AMERICA defines creative placemaking as “the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development.” “What Is Placemaking” from the Project For Public Spaces offers keywords for what the placemaking process is and is not:

PLACEMAKING IS

- Community-driven
- Visionary
- Function before form
- Adaptable
- Inclusive
- Focused on creating destinations
- Context-specific
- Dynamic
- Trans-disciplinary
- Transformative
- Flexible
- Collaborative
- Sociable

PLACEMAKING IS NOT

- Top-down
- Reactionary
- Design-driven
- A blanket solution or quick fix
- Exclusionary
- Car-centric
- One-size-fits-all
- Static
- Discipline-driven
- One-dimensional
- Dependent on regulatory controls
- A cost/benefit analysis
- Project-focused

The film *LANDFALL* is a placemaking film in both content—it shows various community processes for rebuilding Puerto Rico—and in practice. How does the film use placemaking techniques that mirror the community planning and development process?

Using the concepts of placemaking, imagine you are creating a placemaking portrait film that describes your hometown or city at this present moment in history.

In your mapping, consider the following:

- What current issues and challenges would need to be highlighted to tell the story of your home?
- What history would need to be presented in order to fully examine the present moment?
- What local culture and positive contributions would you want to highlight?
- What sub-neighborhoods would you feature and why?
- What local community stakeholders/characters would you feature and why?
- How would you research the local community? Who would you work with when planning the portrait?
- What would be your keywords and terms to guide the research of the film?
- What emotional meaning would you seek to create with the film, and what are some ways you could imagine achieving that?

DIVE DEEPER: FURTHER READING

[“How Films Move Communities”](#) by Sophie Constantinou of Citizen Film, ARTPLACE AMERICA

[“How to Do Creative Placemaking: An Action Oriented Guide to Arts in Community Development,”](#)
National Endowment for the Arts

[“Understanding Artists’ Relationships to Urban Creative Placemaking Through Documentary Storytelling”](#)
by Brian Plow

“Puerto Rico went through a tragedy but the real disaster happened afterwards... More than 5,000 people died because of government in action. We're not equal to them.”

THE PENDING DISASTER OF PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

1. What do we usually see in onscreen depictions of climate disasters? How are these disasters typically framed and presented? When watching LANDFALL, did you notice a different approach? How does the film resist the typical ways of representing disaster?
2. Often hurricanes are framed through either a lens of climate crisis or as a natural disaster- “an act of God.” LANDFALL opens the dialogue to reveal other factors that led to the devastating aftermath of Mar a. What were the “pre-existing conditions” in Puerto Rico that propelled such widespread damage?
3. In a blatant flex of their imperialist muscle, and under the auspices of controlling Puerto Rico’s outsized debt, Congress and former President Barack Obama instituted the unelected, undemocratically imposed control board ‘La Junta’ in 2016 through the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability (PROMESA) Act. La Junta adopted draconian austerity measures which led to a series of social and economic devastations.

In one of the film’s scenes, a Puerto Rican man living in diasporic New York City discusses deaths post-Mar a as a consequence of Puerto Rico’s lack of infrastructure, debt and austerity. What are some of the other consequences of these overlapping conditions that are named in LANDFALL? How did Puerto Rico’s debt become a pathway to the exploitation of the people in the wake of Hurricane María?

4. Through the use of archival film footage, LANDFALL weaves history into the modern story unfolding in the aftermath of Mar a. These scenes, pulled from tourist footage that uses propagandist tactics, show resort golfing on old forts, Navy drills in Vieques, factories that transferred skills from “picking coffee, sewing tobacco leaves, swinging the machete” to rote factory work. What is the relationship between Puerto Rico’s financial crisis and its long history of colonialism?

ENGAGE AND CREATE: DIAGNOSING THE DISEASE OF DISASTER

At the close of the film, we see a protestor on the megaphone gesturing towards law enforcement while saying, “These people aren’t the problem. They are just a symbol, a symptom of the colonial disease!” In Puerto Rico, the long history of colonialism—a man-made disaster—collided with the “natural” disaster of a hurricane (a phenomenon influenced by climate change, and the aftermath made more devastating by the actions of humans). How exactly did these two tangled events—one years long, one weeks—create a mega-disaster on economic, political and social levels?

Doctors and traditional healers know that arriving at a health diagnosis for patients can be a complex process, following multiple steps to arrive at a conclusion and treatment plan. Imagine this scenario: Post-Hurricane María Puerto Rico is a person (and your patient), you are a special doctor, one who takes cues from both ethnomedicine (traditional/cultural approaches) and biomedicine (Western approaches), seeking to discover the disease the country is inflicted with.

Using the following process inspired by the Canadian Medical Protective Association and Center For Practical Bioethics, create an invented—but researched—“diagnosis” for Post-María Puerto Rico. This process could also be applied to other natural disasters propelled by human actions.

- Take an appropriate history of symptoms and collect relevant data, what was out of balance and harmony?— Pre-Hurricane María, what “symptoms” or historical events led to the “disease” that followed the natural disaster? Use both knowledge from LANDFALL, and the Puerto Rico timeline on the LANDFALL website, to form a list.
- Conduct examination, *consider emotions as a cause of illness, as well as religious and spiritual causes*—Take notes on the physical state of the island after the hurricane. What does LANDFALL show us in terms of the physical/emotional devastation of both the community and individual? About the lack of attention to recovery? What was the impact and consequences of the austerity measures spoken of by people in the film? What resources went untapped? Which were exploited? Who failed to respond? What spiritual crises were inflicted upon the people of Puerto Rico throughout history?
- Generate a provisional (educated guess) and differential diagnosis (another possible theory)—Create two main theories of what caused the disaster. You may cluster ideas together to form each “new” diagnosis. Be creative in naming and inventing these “new diseases” based on lived experience and historical facts. Create a term that describes the impact and manifestation of these symptom clusters.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Test (ordering, reviewing, and acting on test results)— *Present and cross reference answers and research steps with other viewers of LANDFALL to compare and contrast information. If accessible, speak to friends and family who lived through the disaster and/or lived on the island in the past to capture their testimony.*
- Reach a final diagnosis—*Come up with a name for the condition Puerto Rico suffers under. What would you call this “disease,” given your above work in research, hypothesizing and testing.*
- Consult (referral to seek clarification if indicated)— *Conduct further research by reading articles presented in this guide. Does your diagnosis have reputable support?*
- Provide discharge instructions, monitoring, and follow-up—*Consider what a treatment plan for Puerto Rico might look like. For now, jot down ideas, thoughts and notes. Before coming to a conclusion, engage the remainder of this discussion guide, particularly the “In Pursuit of a Just Recovery” section. Then, return to prescribe a list of suggestions for actions that have been taken, or could be taken, to heal a community after disaster.*

DIVE DEEPER: FURTHER READING

[“Puerto Rico in Crisis Timeline,”](#) from Centro, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at CUNY’s Hunter College

[“The Roots of Puerto Rico’s Debt Crisis—and Why Austerity Will Not Solve It”](#) by Ed Morales, The Nation

[“How Hurricane Maria Fueled Puerto Rico’s Resistance”](#) by Karen Pinchin, PBS Frontline

[“Puerto Rico’s Latest Man-Made Disaster”](#) by Jonathan M. Katz, Slate



“Last time there was a ‘we,’ my people died.”

DISASTER CAPITALISM: COLONIALISM UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME

1. An unspoken question hovers over each scene presented in *LANDFALL*: after the collective trauma of Hurricane María, who has the right to decide the path forward for Puerto Rico? What are the various possibilities for community and economic repair that surfaced in the film, and who is advocating for each?
2. On the Orocovis farm, María discusses the colonialist impact of the period of 1950’s industrialization known as Operation Bootstrap. “They never said they wanted to improve things for us,” she says, “They wanted to create dependency.” She continues on to describe what makes a local community susceptible to outside forces: “And when you feel vulnerable, what do you do? You believe anything.” When and how do we see this dynamic surface in the film, in both scenes of past and present?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

3. In the conference scene of *LANDFALL*, we watch Yaron Brook, Chairman of the Board of the Ayn Rand Institute, a libertarian think tank, deliver a speech extolling the virtues of privatizing everything. Brook moved to Puerto Rico to avoid paying taxes, and is a vocal proponent of Laws 20 and 22, the tax shelter laws established to attract high net worth people to the island. There's a moment when Brook is speaking about Hong Kong and how great it is, and he asked the audience, what did the British do? Someone shouts 'Free markets!' In this scenario of Puerto Rico post-disaster, who succeeds under the promise of free markets—an economic system without government interference? Who is at risk of getting exploited?
4. Discuss the methods of communicating that the Blockchain representatives use in the film. Identify the various buzzwords used to sing the praises of cryptocurrency as a community-centered technology. Identify any language that mirrors Yaron Brook's ideas. What are the plans for community engagement the representatives lay out? What are the conflicting ideas, motivations and intentions presented through their speeches?
5. To study Puerto Rico's trajectory is to see the reflection of other disasters in the world, such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, which was followed by exploitive economic "rebuilding" strategies that benefited investors with financial stakes, for example, schools turned to charter schools, public housing projects into condominiums. What parallels can be drawn between Puerto Rico's post-María landscape and other disasters in recent past and present?

DIVE DEEPER: FURTHER READING

["There's Nothing Natural About Puerto Rico's Disaster,"](#) by Naomi Klein, *The Intercept*

["Making a Crypto Utopia in Puerto Rico,"](#) by Nellie Bowles, *The New York Times*

["Bitcoin rich kids in Puerto Rico: crypto utopia or crypto-colonialism?"](#) by Larisa Yarovaya and Brian Lucey, *The Conversation*

Podcast: ["Puerto Crypto"](#) by Michael O'brien and Joaquín Cotler, *Latino USA*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“There are still people without electricity, welcome to reality.”



AGAINST THE ROMANTICISM OF RESILIENCY

1. Often when viewing a film about trauma and tragedy, viewers surface words such as “strength” and “resiliency.” In what ways might these reactions be critiqued as patronizing to those who have survived? How might they be interpreted as a shirking of responsibility at a structural, governmental level, and to whom does the burden of survival fall? How does LANDFALL resist these figures of speech and what they represent?
2. The film is threaded with the voice of Lale, the filmmaker’s collaborator, who says, “Something interesting about Puerto Ricans, myself included, is that we have a short memory. We always try to move on. This is our motto, ‘Pa’lante: onwards, always.’” Pa’lante was also used post-María as a marketing slogan on consumer items ranging from beer cans to t-shirts. What is the danger of this sentiment when co-opted by government and corporations?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

3. On the flipside, Lale's framing of the Pa'lante phenomenon as an idea/ideology among the people themselves reveals a question about the origin of the statement itself. The motivation behind the term is a derivation of the failing capitalist system that led to widespread collapse and devastation on the island. In the reverse, what is the danger of the Pa'lante sentiment when the people are upholding and reproducing it, and accepting it as their new "normal"?
4. An alternative slogan has surfaced from activists post-María: DISASTER IS POLITICAL. What does that mean? How is it different from "Pa'lante?" What is the difference between resilience and resistance as a framework for discussing the spirit of a people in the aftermath of large-scale disaster?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**ENGAGE AND CREATE: SLOGANS OF RESISTANCE**

Moving from “Pa’lante,” which cheerfully papers over the structural reasons for the natural and economic disasters in Puerto Rico, to “Disaster is Political,” which emphasizes and points to the structural nature of the exploitation and violence, you’ll be creating slogans that refrain from using resiliency as a driving message, and instead embrace the concept and act of resistance.

Before you begin, choose a cause you care about and write a “brain dump” of all words, ideas and concepts connected to this cause. For example, if I chose Anti-Racism as my cause, I might write words such as racism, police, Black girl magic, non-monolithic, protests, history, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Next, write a paragraph mission statement that encapsulates the change you hope to propel. What do you stand for? What do you affirm? What do you rally against? Black Lives Matter, a slogan developed to combat police and vigilante violence against Black people, writes the following in the about section of their website:

#BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer. Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.

We are expansive. We are a collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement. We also believe that in order to win and bring as many people with us along the way, we must move beyond the narrow nationalism that is all too prevalent in Black communities. We must ensure we are building a movement that brings all of us to the front.

We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centers those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements.

We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise.

We affirm our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.

DIVE DEEPER: FURTHER READING

[“Disasters - Is the Resilience Dialogue Bankrupt?”](#) by David Baxter, LinkedIn

[“Activists Challenge Concept Of ‘Resilience,’ Advocate For Change”](#) by Tegan Wendland, New Orleans Public Radio

[“Puerto Rican Politics Will Never Be the Same,”](#) by Yarimar Bonilla, Jacobin

[“What Is Behind the Protests in Puerto Rico?”](#) The New York Times

[Resilience Is the Goal of Governments and Employers Who Expect People to Endure Crisis,](#) Teen Vogue

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“I don’t want to spend my whole life fighting, I want to be able to say, this is the country we want and I’ll have it now.”

IN PURSUIT OF A JUST RECOVERY

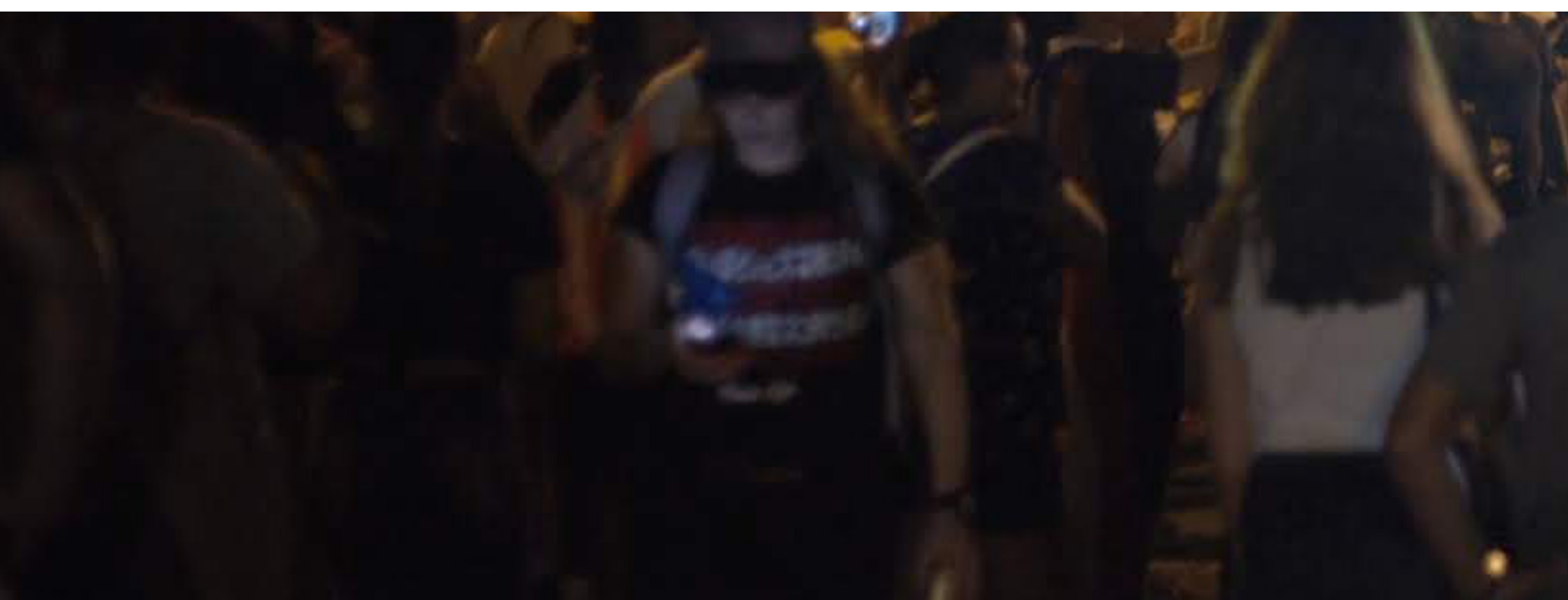
1. Over footage of abandoned water bottles, we hear Lale’s voice again: “On the same day when Trump arrived, 160 people died while he was throwing paper towels. There’s no respect for what happened... Hurricane survivors made it because of other survivors.” In the face of government failure, what is the knowledge that frontline communities uniquely hold when meeting disaster? How does the “survivors-helping-survivors” framework rewrite the narrative of victimhood?
2. In Bartolo, we watch a small group rescuing a school shuttered and abandoned by the government and making plans to meet various community members’ needs. One woman describes the process, “We began to dream, talk to people and transform the classrooms. We are living socialism in our daily lives. The hurricane has brought us towards a society where the common denominator is the common good.” How and where have you seen similar mutual aid efforts emerge during other disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic? Why and how are community-driven and institutionally-autonomous responses often powerful experiences?
3. Where in LANDFALL do we see adrienne marie brown’s “pleasure activism” concept illustrated—thinking of politics and political action as a holistic day-to-day experience that prioritizes the feeling of joy. Why and how is it important for communities to build and share their own spaces that cater to the needs of the group, rather than play to the pressure and influence of outside forces?
4. Thinking back to the principles of creative placemaking as a guide, in your opinion, what are the ingredients to building a “just recovery” after a local, national, or global disaster? Consider the COVID-19 global pandemic that caused widespread illness, death and financial disaster—colliding with other social and political upheavals, such as rampant and murderous police brutality, and the climate catastrophe of raging West Coast wildfires. What parallels exist between the people’s response to the pandemic and its surrounding conditions, and the people’s response to the Post-María disaster documented in LANDFALL? What can be learned from Puerto Rico’s resistance movement that can be applied to recovering from the pandemic moving forward?

ENGAGE AND CREATE: DESIGNING A PEOPLE'S UTOPIAN PROTEST

In contrast to the crypto-colonialist vision of utopia, another scene in LANDFALL shows friends communing over food and drink, discussing personal ideas of utopia and hope. One local Puerto Rican woman names her personal hope and vision of utopia post-María as being able to feel free, to walk into the street without fear of being mugged, or be harmed by a man, to not worry how to pay bills, to not be faced with another friend leaving the island to survive.

This vision of utopia values freedom, liberation, connection, safety, love, solidarity and community abundance— all concepts visually and physically manifested on the dance floor towards the close of the film.

adrienne marie brown, the author who coined the term “pleasure activism,” has expressed awe at activists in Puerto Rico who baked the experience of pleasure, community, mutual aid and art into the design of resistance. On The MATRIARCHitects podcast, adrienne recalls a protest schedule from Puerto Rico that included diverse activities such as group cycling, bedtime story reading, grinding dance parties, yoga and meditation, human chain, 5k run and a mini-concert for kids.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In your group, loosely begin to envision your version of a people's utopian protest, inspired by the creative, joyful activism— highlighted in [this article](#)— of the Puerto Rican resistance movement using the following steps:

1. Define the cause you are rallying for or against. The more specific to you, or your community— tied together by location, identity, shared values, lived experience, etc., the better.
2. Determine the values that you bring to the ultimate vision you are fighting for.
3. Under each value, brainstorm a list of activities that make you feel this way in daily life. For example: love might be illustrated by exchanging texts of gratitude with friends Liberation by dancing under headphones. Community abundance by gardening in a public setting.
4. Create an original protest schedule designed to mobilize people to join your fight by building the utopian vision—the pleasure, the joy, the love, the community safety, the creativity—into the planned actions. Imagine your perfect day of resistance: what does it include?

DIVE DEEPER: FURTHER READING

[“Puerto Rico Protesters Got Creative: Dancing, Singing, Diving...”](#) by Charo Henríquez, The New York Times

[“Our Power Puerto Rico: Moving Toward A Just Recovery.”](#) Climate Justice Alliance

[“The Use of the Erotic, The Erotic As Power,”](#) essay by Audre Lorde

[“Our Power Puerto Rico For A Just Recovery & Resilient Rebuild”](#) by Caroline Fortuna, Clean Technica

[“Pleasure as Praxis, adrienne maree brown on Human Error, Longing, and the Power of Prioritizing Love”](#) by Corinne Manning, Bitch Media

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https://practicalbioethics.org/files/members/documents/Pachter_11_2.pdf

<https://www.inc.com/ss/5-tips-for-writing-an-effective-slogan>

<https://www.alphabetapublishingbooks.com/wp-content/uploads/How-to-Organize-a-Mini-Debate.pdf>