

Race determines place: April de Simone and Charles T. Brown on advancing spatial justice



Keynote speakers April De Simone and Charles T. Brown emphasized how systemic inequities and historical injustices continue to shape the spatial and social landscape in society and highlight the need for transformative change at the regional, community, and individual levels. While equity focuses on fair distribution and access to resources and opportunities, justice encompasses broader considerations of fairness, accountability, and the protection of rights and dignity. Achieving equity is an important component of achieving justice, but justice also involves addressing systemic injustices and upholding moral and ethical principles in society.

April discussed how community solidarity, resistance, and collective action are essential in creating more just and equitable communities, which involves creating spaces for dialogue, sharing lived experiences, and amplifying voices of Black and Brown residents whose history, traditions, culture, and existence are at the core of systemic change. Charles explained how addressing “[Arrested Mobility](#)” in both policing and planning is needed to prevent adverse outcomes, as Black people and other people of color’s right to move, be moved, or simply exist in public spaces has been denied by legal and illegal authority. Arrested mobility stresses the importance of centering not just equity—but racial equity—in transportation access and mobility.

Key discussion points

1 Advocate for reparative measures. Democracy and political processes are key to shaping societal outcomes and addressing behavioral and systemic injustices. Greater civic engagement, political accountability, and democratic participation are key to driving meaningful change.

2 Dismantle oppressive systems. We must recognize the intersectionality of issues related to race, place, health, and mobility, highlighting how these factors are interconnected and shape individuals’ lived experiences. We must address the root causes of systemic inequities rather than just addressing the symptoms. And we must increase access to power, redistribute and provide additional resources, and eliminate barriers.

3 Promote justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our governing systems. Just and inclusive communities—where diversity is celebrated, equity is upheld, and all individuals have the opportunity to thrive—require spatial desegregation, community investment, and the prioritization of justice alongside equity.



“The architecture of our humanity starts when we put our hands in the soil and humanize everyone around us.”

– April De Simone,
Founder & Managing Principal,
Practices of Democracy



“What I need for you to do is address this illness of arrested mobility, because without it, you’re simply advocating for equity only to deal with the symptoms, never to address the root cause.”

– Charles T Brown,
Founder & CEO,
Equitable Cities, LLC

Culture is resistance

Communities of color have endured violence, death, and brutality through decades of discriminatory practices and systems of oppression. The continued existence and presence of community shows that resistance is found in the ways that people of color build relationships with each other, how they love each other, and how they prioritize well-being and happiness. Supporting and celebrating culture in communities that are already in place, and recognizing that just to live is a radical act, helps break down the spatial stigmatization that still exists in communities.

Questions to ask



There are several types of justice, each addressing different aspects of fairness, rights, and moral principles within society. To address the different types of justice, we must consider:

- 1 What damage can be inflicted by lack of recognition and misrecognition? (**recognition justice**)
- 2 Who has physical access to the street, park, or trail? (**distributive justice**)
- 3 Who has influence over design, operations, and programming within the community? (**procedural justice**)
- 4 What makes people feel welcome or unwanted in a space? (**interactional justice**)
- 5 Do people feel their experience and history is represented in a space? (**representational justice**)
- 6 To what degree have injustices arising from past decisions been rectified? (**restorative justice**)

What's Next?

- Planners:** Create healing spaces, based on the values and needs of the community
(Examples: yoga and meditation centers, food cafes, and coworking spaces)
- Community Members:** Bring people together to start a community development corporation that is focused on shared equity housings models
- Homeowners:** Form an equity trust—a financial model that ensures long term affordability of a house (equity in the structure goes into a trust instead of the homeowner, securing
- Policymakers:** Continue to center race in federal, state, and local initiatives, plans, and programs, and decriminalize policies and processes (ex: jaywalking, traffic violations)
- Real Estate Developers:** Invest in infrastructure in Black and Brown communities

Recommended resources



Check out: [The Practice of Democracy: Democracy is...](#)

Listen: [Arrested Mobility](#) explores why Black Americans and people of color are disproportionately victims of overly aggressive police enforcement. Host Charles T. Brown will take you to the streets of Philly, the sidewalks of Seattle, and the neighborhoods of Kansas City to ask: What can we do to change the outcomes when people of color step out their door to exist in the world?

Explore: The [This Land](#) project is a cross-collaborative initiative working to redefine land use and tenure in communities across the United States utilizing an intentional participatory design process.

Visit: Nationally acclaimed "[Undesign the Redline](#)" exhibit.