

**DISEASE.
DISPARITY.**

THE TWIN PANDEMIC

BLACK PEOPLE AND BLACK
COMMUNITIES BEAR THE OUTSIZED
IMPACTS OF PUBLIC VIOLENCE AND,
NOW, THE DEADLY CORONAVIRUS.
SIX BLACK LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTS AND AN ARCHITECT
PARSE THE SPATIAL FACTORS
THAT UNDERLIE EACH CRISIS—
OFTEN BOTH CRISES—AND THE
KINDS OF ACTIONS AND REFORMS
THEY HOPE TO SEE.

The idea for the following discussion, which took place the afternoon of June 22, 2020, via videoconference, first arose in late April as it became clear that the pandemic brought on by the novel coronavirus COVID-19 was doing disproportionate damage in Black communities in the United States: three times the number of infections as white people, and nearly twice the likelihood of death. The health crisis and an economic shutdown were quick to layer onto the existing vulnerabilities of Black people in the realms of health care, employment, wealth creation, community investment, mobility, and access to the virus's nemeses—fresh air, open space, and daylight. Diane Jones Allen, FASLA, and M. Austin Allen III, ASLA, based in New Orleans and Arlington, Texas, invited four other landscape architecture practitioners and one architect to a call to talk about the spatial inequities to which the spread of the virus is plausibly attributable.

As the virus spread in May, there came national and international attention, two months delayed, to the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, 25, by racist vigilantes as he was out for a run in daylight on February 23 just outside Brunswick, Georgia, and the killing of Breonna Taylor, who was 26, in her home early the morning of March 13 by Louisville Metro Police, who were executing a no-knock warrant. Then on May 25, Memorial Day, George Floyd, 46, was murdered in public view by a Minneapolis police officer who knelt on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds in the course of answering a call for an alleged nonviolent offense at a convenience store. As anger gathered and then exploded in street uprisings across the country, the group of designers on these pages had an expanded scope to cover—two plagues, not one, to dissect for causes and complications that bear directly on the callings of landscape architecture, its ideals, and its ill preparedness for such a moment. One plague is novel, and the other is now four centuries with us.

WITH
DIANE JONES ALLEN, FASLA
M. AUSTIN ALLEN III, ASLA
CHARLES CROSS
JUNE GRANT
ELIZABETH KENNEDY, ASLA
JESCELLE R. MAJOR, ASLA
AND
DOUGLAS A. WILLIAMS, ASLA

M. AUSTIN ALLEN III, ASLA: What's been on my mind lately is, and I've spoken to several people about this, it reminds me so much of 1968—and 1968 more on steroids than 1968 itself. And it is fascinating that it is global. It is so many shifts in the ways that people see themselves and see themselves differently, how much race and particularly the African American experience plays such a pivotal role.

I was explaining to some folks that what we saw in Mexico City in 1968 as African Americans [the raised-fist salute by the American track medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos during their medal ceremony to protest racial injustice in the United States] was in the air at the Olympics, but people have seen that [event] in isolation. They didn't realize that, before that, there was a whole mass student movement in Mexico City that

had a lot to do with the dynamics of what happened in the Olympics that day. One event after another drove us all to some new heights. There are lessons to be learned, and things to really not do again from that time, and I just see it as so fascinating as new generations are figuring that out and really taking the lead.

JUNE GRANT: Hi, everyone. June Grant, architect. And I wish to thank Elizabeth [Kennedy] who has been incredibly instrumental in pulling me into the landscape conversation. My studio, blinkLAB architecture, in addition to buildings, works closely with communities. Thirty percent of the studio's projects are community-based, and 70 percent are private commissions. Essentially, we have positioned ourselves so that if a community wants a new bench, we'll design and have it fabricated. We pretty much answer any call!

And one call that has been consistent is the request to partner with communities in the revival of African American cultural spaces that were eliminated, whether through redevelopment or economic decline. Increasingly over the past five years, we have assisted in funding and grant pursuits. However, looking more closely at the pandemic, the issue of police violence, and, let's just say, the mass cohesion around those two topics, federal and philanthropic foundations are now more open to listen and are more willing to provide increased funding toward the very same solutions that communities have been asking for assistance with for many years. That said, I am very concerned about an economic decline that will hit Black communities even harder. On the other hand, I am optimistic about the new support that we are experiencing around funding, in both philanthropic and

federal agencies, to address Black community issues—inequity, poor urban spaces, air quality—and that gives me some kind of hope.

JESCELLE R. MAJOR, ASLA: This is a really interesting moment for me because it's the first time that I've seen a social justice movement of this scale in my lifetime. And it's also the first time in my work that everything is related to what I'm doing in my day-to-day as a professional and completely linked to my personal life. I think it's usually one or the other or there are a few ways that I'm connected to an issue or a client or something that's going on in my home life based on my identity; but now, it's all linked up, and the twin pandemics are sort of explicitly linked at this time. I am from the South and now I live in Seattle, and I think just the context there is super different to see. Seattle is now sort of one of the hot spots of both movements. It's the home of the first coronavirus case, and it is also the home of the CHAZ [Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone], CHOP [Capitol Hill Organized Protest], and all of [their] rippling effects. And it's the complete opposite corner of the country from where my family is and my biggest networks are, and I think that matters when you start thinking about

a health crisis. I think that matters when you start thinking about being one of the only Black people that you know in a region, and I think it matters as a professional operating in all of those spaces.

I work at a planning and policy firm. I transitioned into that work after working at an interdisciplinary architecture and landscape architecture firm here. And I had been leading in a lot of community engagement outreach work, which looks very different now in the time of COVID. I think, to some of June's points, that this work is more important than it's ever been for getting communities, and the things that they've been asking for, in front of people.

And the work is more strained. But those hours, at the same time, have been reduced at work, so I'm immediately feeling the economic impact of that, seeing what it means to be getting community engagement in a time that they need to be engaged, in a time where there are health concerns around that, front and center. How do I use my professional skills at protests? And so I fully evolved from having this additional time while not working full time to starting my own consulting work that's centered around the uprising and Black Lives Matter work. So it's

linked back that the extra space I have due to the economic issues of COVID is now time that I have to commit to addressing the social justice issues. So it's an interesting back-and-forth switching of the scales and taking back what I know from my life and what I'm experiencing there into my professional work.

DOUGLAS A. WILLIAMS, ASLA: My background is horticulture and landscape architecture, and I currently am working more full time with Volunteers in Service to America, VISTA, the AmeriCorps Program, which I have done for two years here in the city of Chicago, working with underserved communities and building a capacity for nonprofit organizations. So I'm not in a traditional landscape architecture position at this time. Also, I'm allowed to take on other nonconflicting work, so I assisted in coursework on regional planning or regional landscape design with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign last fall, and during this time, I've also taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in a global architecture history course.

I'm thinking about a lot of things, particularly in the program I work with, Project Exploration, which is for STEM professions, for under-resourced communities in Chicago—



M. AUSTIN ALLEN III, ASLA

Allen is an associate professor of practice in the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Arlington. He previously taught at the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University and at the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Colorado Denver. Allen is a principal with Diane Jones Allen, FASLA, at DesignJones LLC. He has worked on recovery projects in New Orleans, particularly in the Lower Ninth Ward, since 2005. The College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, presented Allen with its Distinguished Alumni Award in March 2017. Allen produced and directed the documentary *Claiming Open Spaces* (1995), and recently wrote "Site of the Unseen: The Racial Gaming of American Landscapes," a chapter in the forthcoming book *Black Landscapes Matter* edited by Walter Hood, ASLA, and Grace Mitchell Tada, Student ASLA (University of Virginia Press, November 2020).

PROJECT SHOWN: Hayden Plaza, Faubourg Lafayette, New Orleans



mostly Black and Brown and the economically deprived working with Chicago Public Schools. They don't have the resources to have the technology available—if they do have a laptop or some type of device—so they can't do distance learning. I'm following in real time with a lot of universities and how they're trying to process these changes. They got the students off campus and they're now trying to bring them back onto campus. And then realizing a lot of individuals in communities I serve, how for some time, many generations, have been deprived of various resources. So this pandemic is something that exacerbates that problem to a great degree in terms of preexisting health conditions and then the lack of services.

But my work is public spaces, the Chicago Large Lots program, people who have been purchasing vacant lots and making use of them beyond their own initial caring for them, but that work also alludes to the 1960s when [Martin Luther] King was killed. These spaces were burned out and left delinquent and dilapidated, redlining all these things. And even still today, we see federal programs of assistance that aren't reaching these smaller, usually Black and Brown businesses, and if they do arrive, they arrive late and they are

insufficient. So there's a history. I'm just thinking of a lot of exemplars in terms of African American studies. We've had this for some time, if it's Carter G. Woodson talking about the needs and history of African Americans, Harriet Washington's book called *Medical Apartheid*, which talks about medical research and the history of African Americans being used in experimentation, and the health care services going back into enslavement times, when you'd prefer to be buried in a grave that was unmarked because [otherwise] you would be dug up and be used as some folly for what was really a very poor system of health care and research and study, even in terms of hospitals. I'm thinking of a toxicity that Dorceta Taylor talks about in her work out of the University of Michigan, which makes very clear about, not so much not-in-my-backyard, but it shouldn't be in anyone's backyard, and that goes back to Robert Bullard's use of the term "environmental racism." So, there's a history here that's clearly being voiced on a very broad scale, because now everyone is susceptible to the finality of life, based on something as extensive as a major medical illness that's silent and quiet. In fact, I am training right now to be a contact tracer. That's another job that I take on, so there are a lot of things that I do that are in-

tertwined and connected and relate to health. That's what we're charged with as landscape architects, health and safety, which I think most professions, they claim that, but it takes a lot of work to get to that.

CHARLES CROSS: I'm currently working as the director of landscape architecture at the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, which is part of the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture. We are a nonprofit design studio that works strictly with nonprofits, mainly in Detroit. Most of our work, about 95 percent, is in Detroit. So we have an opportunity to see a lot of different circumstances, and everybody knows that Detroit's had a rough go at it here as of late. We are working with our community partners to rebuild neighborhoods and bring our city to a new level that we haven't seen in quite some time.

One of the big pieces is trying to be certain that the development and the design work are done in an equitable manner, and trying to make sure that the design process is inclusive, and that's kind of where we focus a lot of our engagement so we can ensure that outcome. You know, we've got a lot of different things going on in Detroit, and we've been hit very hard by COVID. I actually have

DIANE JONES ALLEN, FASLA

“AFRICAN AMERICAN AND OTHER UNDERREPRESENTED PEOPLE KNOW QUITE A BIT ABOUT MANY ASPECTS OF LANDSCAPE BUT DO NOT ARTICULATE THEM IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE PROFESSION HAS COME TO EXPECT.”

—M. AUSTIN ALLEN III, ASLA

lost, I think, 23 people now that I know—one of my mentors, Michael Sorkin, being one of them. So we’re trying to understand this and work through this issue. We have a new governor, they call her Big Gretch, Gretchen Whitmer, and she has put us on a path to understanding that this will kill you, and you need to stay home and you need to put a mask on and you need to be safe. So that’s been the focus here.

We’re still working with our community partners, but it’s in a whole different way now. We’re using new technology. We are working with some community groups largely made up of seniors, and Zoom doesn’t always work for us in that situation. We are trying to find other ways of engaging like using the mail to send out surveys and questionnaires. We’re working on some very interesting projects right now in community-based design work, a lot of it in the landscape realm. I’m happy to say, I’m currently working on a project with a community partner, Vanguard CDC, on Black Bottom Park. We’re exploring the possibilities of bringing cultural and educational opportunities back to an area that once was a thriving Black commercial corridor replaced with I-75. It brings to mind something that our good friend Kofi Boone has

talked about: racialized topography. And when you talk about Black Bottom, here in Detroit, it was different. It was not named because of the low-lying floodplain area. It was just because of the black soil, the very rich farmland. But that brings that to mind.... I don’t like when people say, “Oh, we’re going to give the community a voice.” The community has a voice. It’s being diminished and nobody’s listening. One of the things we like to say is that we’re going to turn the volume up on the community’s voice. This is how we work toward more equitable outcomes.

ELIZABETH KENNEDY, ASLA: Well, I’ve had a practice for 25 years now. We literally just celebrated our 25th anniversary. I have an alum on this call—Charles worked for me at one time. And before that, I worked in the construction and development of affordable housing. I ran about 23 projects with \$70 million worth of community redevelopment work. And out of that process, I got to see where landscape, where open space, really didn’t fit in to the redevelopment equation, and how, in New York, which is I think a pretty unique environment, where everything is so concentrated, you could see how open space is not really recognized in this city in the way that it feels in-

tegrated in the fabric in other places. In terms of these past three months, I’ve worn many hats. I run a business and I have payroll and I didn’t lay anybody off, so keeping people busy has been a focus. But I’ve also just watched with horror what happened in my community—and when I say my community, I mean my Caribbean American community: I’m Jamerican, first-generation American-born child of immigrants, the whole bit. And so my sensitivity is actually toward the immigrant communities, and when nobody was really paying attention, I kept saying, this thing is tearing through the immigrant communities here. We’re talking about Black and Hispanic people, but we’re talking about the immigrant community here, and for me, the whole question is about how these communities—how these microcosms within this whole nine-million-person metropolitan area—do and do not tune into the information that’s going to deeply affect their lives. It was something that you saw played out in the COVID maps.

And so, my issues for this discussion [shared beforehand] are about balkanization and isolation and separation that were such...not a puzzle, but such an area of grief for me, because I know what happens in these communities and I know why

they don’t buy in. I’m amazed that in a city where you have a progressive mayor there wasn’t the kind of outreach that enabled these people very exposed to the virus to have agency. I can’t say that they could have protected themselves, because again, in New York, these were the people who made the city run while the rest of us got to stay home. But, very clearly, there was not the opportunity for those communities to say no in the way that they needed to, to protect themselves.

How that translates into landscape, into how the common space of the city is actually shared and understood, goes to how little basic things like shutting down the subways so that they can sanitize overnight become such a huge thing—the ability for the city to take just some basic steps. And I raise the subways in what might seem an off point because, for years, they’ve been talking about whether or not New York remains a 24-hour city because of the maintenance that it requires to run this city. And so, when COVID sort of put everybody’s back to the wall and we said, we have to shut down, they shut down the subway—one, because they had to clean, but two, because the homeless who were sheltering in the subway had also exploded to compound

the public health problem. So you had COVID, you had homelessness pushing political will and decision making where there had been inertia. Then you had incidents where clearly there was a real, for want of a better word, distinction between how the police were policing white kids hanging out, drinking, smoking reefer, all the rest of it, and getting a “move along now,” versus Black people being wrestled to the ground and tasered, if they were lucky. And this just played out with everybody feeling a sort of helplessness.

So, by the time George Floyd was murdered in the way that he was murdered—because I’m also very clear that had he been shot, it wouldn’t have had the impact that the kneeling had—this pushed everything over to the point where half of the city said, *We don’t want to be complicit anymore*, and the other half said, *We’ve had enough*. That’s huge. That needed to happen. And I think we needed to be stuck indoors for nine to 10 weeks in order to get there.

There was an article that I wanted to raise in the course of this conversation that I’d posted on Facebook with a comment, and I think June saw it, because June and I are fast Facebook friends. It was an article in the *New*

York Times (and I have my feelings about the *Times*) that I think goes to landscape specifically, because it featured people who all of a sudden discovered, with COVID emptying the streets, open spaces they hadn’t otherwise given a second thought. They realized that these open spaces had walls that, in the shutdown, they could take their tennis rackets and play against, these great backstops. And not once did the article mention that these were your typical, everyday New York City playground handball courts—courts that are used heavily by certain kinds of people in the city. One particular protagonist walks by this handball court every day, and she doesn’t notice that it’s a handball court, or she doesn’t notice that it’s in use because somehow the people who are using this court are either invisible to her or their presence has made the court invisible to her. And to me, this is the whole crux and nexus of how people of color, Black people, become invisible in New York City. It reinforced what happened with the explosion of COVID in the city.

DIANE JONES ALLEN, FASLA: So, looking at what’s happened—especially what’s happening now, I guess, the aftermath of both of these events—the wonderful thing is that people are standing their ground.

Finally, Black people are standing their ground. To steal a line from someone I know [Austin Allen], people are claiming their open spaces. And that's really important to me and that's why I really love what the mayor of D.C. did when she put Black Lives Matter in the street, and now other cities are doing it. But also claiming their space in the reaction to George Floyd, because basically citizens are saying, we want to take back our communities. We don't want police running us.

For African Americans—and this relates to research that I've been doing for a long time—we've been forced nomads. We've been nomadic. We haven't been allowed to have our space. So, some of the research I'm doing right now is looking at Maroons, who I love because they said, we're here, we're going to be here, but we're going to be free. And people know about Maroons, especially the famous Maroons in Haiti and Jamaica, where Elizabeth's roots are. Most people don't know that there were large Maroon populations in the United States, including the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia and North Carolina and also the Louisiana Wetlands. These were actually thriving communities, which were learning how to live with nature—maybe we

wouldn't experience many of the environmental issues we do had Maroon communities been allowed to thrive. They were learning how to live with nature, but this space was taken away from them. They were basically eliminated in the United States. Canals were cut through the swamps, timber was cut down, the swamps and wetlands were destroyed, and Maroons were chased and murdered in the process. Black people were later shifted through other processes, including in the Great Migration. And you look at the Greenwood community in Tulsa; everyone's learning about this now. Black people decided, we're not going to be a burden on this society as they say we are. We're going to be good citizens and have our own businesses, have our own banks and homes—yet all this was burned down. African Americans were and are continually shifted. Redlining was a way to shift us, and now gentrification is a way to shift us. So we cannot claim ground. It's great to see that Black people are standing up.

The way this relates to COVID is because when you're shifting like this, you can't develop a good relationship with nature. You have environmental injustice because you get shifted to where the oil refinery

is or to the lowland where you get flooded. So you can't have a good relationship with nature, which impacts your health. The other thing I had been working on and still do is transit deserts. You get shifted out to the outer rings where you can't get to work, you can't get to the hospital, you can't get to family connections. There's bad transit or no transit. It's intentional. I've gotten pushback, especially when I've given talks about transit deserts: *How can you say they were forced?* is a response I get. I reply, yes, they were forced. Historically we have been forced nomads. And because of that, we receive higher impacts from COVID. The thing Elizabeth was mentioning is so true about how you're forced out to the outer rings and then, because you've been shifted, you don't have economic wealth. You're shifted out, so if you have a job, you have one of those emergency or frontline jobs.... I'm thinking of the word that they've been using now in the COVID pandemic. The *essential* workers, right? You're probably an essential worker—you're working in a senior citizen building, or you are driving the bus, or you're one of the people who are taking care of our infrastructure. You're probably riding transit and so you're suffering because of that, because you're more exposed. Whereas I'm home sitting



DOUGLAS A. WILLIAMS, ASLA

Williams is a past Fulbright scholar in Africa and a Denver Service Center (National Park Service) landscape architect. He studied in the Caribbean and in Europe while completing his bachelor's degree program in horticulture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). In addition, he studied in Japan before finishing his master's in landscape architecture program at Cornell University. Williams earned a doctoral degree in landscape architecture from UIUC, where he was also a postdoctoral research associate in the College of Applied Health Sciences. He has practiced at all levels of government and private practice, and has taught at historically Black institutions. Williams focuses now on building capacity with nonprofit organizations implementing Quality-of-Life Plans in Chicago as part of AmeriCorps VISTA.

PROJECT SHOWN: Career Showcase at the Black Creativity program at the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago



in front of my computer, there are people having to get on the bus, and all of this is related to this shifting, this taking away of ground, this not allowing people to be in a place to connect with nature and to build wealth and to build health.

The encouraging thing, the positive thing I've seen is that now we're talking about these things, issues that didn't matter to those not suffering from the consequences. Everyone now is talking about it. I'm happy about that. So now we're talking about these issues and you see young people, and all kinds of people, out in the streets saying, we're going to claim our space, we're going to take America back, the America we helped to build. We're going to claim it back. To me, that's a great fight, and it is really important for a true democratic society.

LAM: Where is landscape architecture in all of this? Where is it, and where has it been failing in its knowledge of its history?

KENNEDY: Where to start? I think a couple of things. I think that the profession in and of itself kind of struggles with its identity. I don't think that there is ever a landscape architect who doesn't at some point in their career complain over coffee

or a gin and tonic or crying into their beer or to their parents or whatever it is, that people don't really know what landscape architects do. It's a very broad profession, a very diverse profession. And the profession itself sometimes swings between an emphasis of work for the common good, where the legacy of doing the national parks is one thing, and then doing work for the über-rich. And in all of this, you could almost say that landscape architecture hasn't addressed, I want to say, hasn't looked at issues of class and poverty and all of these things at all, much less looked at issues of race and injustice at all. And in this country, that obliviousness...you know, part of the dialogue that we're having right now is that the obliviousness extends across so many other fields. I mean, it's not unique to landscape architecture.

But I think that because we hold ourselves in such noble self-regard that we could be probably more indicted. I think that even in the dialogue that the profession has reported to want to have with Black Americans, there isn't comfort even with being uncomfortable with what you hear. Nobody wants to hear a hard truth even about the listening skills of the people who allegedly want to have the dialogue. So, across

the board by the habit of negating and making people invisible and, as Diane says, in moving and disposing of people, of course you're not going to think of these communities as clients. There's no recognition of the client, right? So there's no respect of the client. And this goes on at macroscopic levels in terms of the investments that are made, and it goes on at microscopic levels in the approach to program. There's just this disregard, this belief...well, landscape architects are kind of arrogant anyway in that there's a tendency not to be able to engage with clients authentically, and then it just sort of extends down to this level. You can tell I'm disillusioned and I'm tired.

AUSTIN ALLEN: If I can add a little something here too in that way, I've thought for years that we just don't talk about Olmsted in the way that we need for this time and place, and that is: Olmsted is a much more complex person than, all of a sudden, one day we have Central Park. We have Olmsted coming to this complex issue around slavery enough that he writes three books before he even gets Central Park really off the ground. They all have to do with how African Americans and the land are a part of the equation. What we don't do in this discipline

PHOTO: LEFT, MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY, CHICAGO, RIGHT



DIANE JONES ALLEN, FASLA

Allen is the program director and a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Texas at Arlington. She is a principal landscape architect with M. Austin Allen III, ASLA, at DesignJones LLC, which received the 2016 ASLA Community Service Award. Allen has served as a member of the ASLA Blue Ribbon Panel on Climate Change (2017) and as a board member of the Landscape Architecture Foundation, working on its diversity and climate subcommittees. She is the author of *Lost in the Transit Desert: Race, Transit Access, and Suburban Form* (Routledge, 2017), and a coeditor of *Design as Democracy: Techniques for Collective Creativity* (Island Press, 2017).

PROJECT SHOWN: Restoration Park, Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans



“THE PROFESSION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE HAS ALSO DECIDED WHAT CULTURE IS THE IMPORTANT CULTURE.”

—DIANE JONES ALLEN, FASLA

is shape the discipline in a way that creates such a strong dynamic that really is at work and at play here, and it's this denial of it over centuries that has, I think, given us all kinds of illusions about what we're up to as landscape architects.

WILLIAMS: I have to add to both Elizabeth's and Austin's reading on this that it's also the avoidance. They can avoid it. It's not in your history courses. I was just listening in to a group of landscape architecture students across the country, and they were asking these questions like, where do Black people show up in your history class? There was a silence. I said, the two major books that we utilize—Elizabeth Barlow Rogers [*Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*] and a husband and wife team, Geoffrey Alan Jellicoe and Susan Jellicoe [*The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day*—you know, we don't even show up in Egypt. And so that's what attracted me to other areas of landscape architecture in Japan, and other things of that nature, because I didn't show up. I didn't meet a Black landscape architect until I was in my master's program, at least a year or two in, and that was Kofi Boone. That was when they had a conference that Craig Barton put

together called Sites of Memory at the University of Virginia. He's now at Brown University and was a provost at the time at the School of the Art Institute when I was there. So we don't show up in that way. It becomes an appendix, and, of course, you can take it if you want to or not, but most people don't take it because it's not a requirement. I've got to become licensed; I've got to get out there and do what you told me I need to do, which is build beautiful landscapes, and so this is the juxtaposition.

I'm thinking of Toni Morrison, a line from *Beloved* where it says, “it never looked as terrible as it was, and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too, fire and brimstone, all right, but hidden in Lacy Groves.” And there are a number of other slices in the African American work that you see this sort of dichotomy of both beautiful landscape, but the social constructs around it are problematized, and Morrison goes back into the 1600s before enslavement was racialized, in one of her novels, *A Mercy*. And then you get a chance to—you think it's always been a Black thing. Of course chattel enslavement is very unique to our experience on this landscape—but you look back at that time when you're reading the novel, and you

think, oh, all these people must be Black. And as she begins to give you more facts about them, you realize, wait a minute, no, it's a lot of different problems here across the board that we need to recognize. This isn't a landscape, she says, her characters cannot come into play until I know the place. If there were no dandelions, I can't talk about them because there were none at that time; they were introduced. We talk about native plants. We were going to get native soils. How are we going to behave like native populations to manage that, our planning practices?

You know, it's a capitalist system when you think about it. Angela Davis talks about this system. And so we put people underwater, in water, even when we know that the 100-year flood and all these other things are there, so we put them at the margins, just so that we can profit, being pushed out into the outer rings. William A. Johnson Jr., the first Black mayor of Rochester, New York, has a very compelling documentary on white flight and class flight from cities on the East Coast and in the South. It just shows how it's leapfrogging. If it wasn't white flight, it was class flight. We created these ghettos, these sort of...William Julius Wilson says, a

“truly disadvantaged,” because now you had these concentrated levels of poverty. Before John Singleton passed away [in 2019] after being the youngest one to get an Oscar, for *Boyz n the Hood*, he did a series on the drug epidemic in California, and how it was introduced by the powers that be, even the opioids, on *60 Minutes*. So you see how people that are in power oftentimes take advantage of it, and they truly are, not just of those truly disadvantaged, but everybody else, if you're not paying attention to what's going on and have a social network. As Harriet Washington points out, you have to have a medical historian on any research project because people are marginalized by racism, discrimination, or classism; experimented on without consent; and made invisible by othering them, so they become further marginalized. We get a troubled landscape.

GRANT: Right. My knowledge of landscape architecture started with Diana Balmori and landforms. My background prior to architecture was sculpture, so I immediately appreciated her manipulation of land as a fluid, formable thing. But throughout, and over the years, I questioned: Where does culture get pulled into the design solution? Where is history added into this

shaping of land? And one of the things I find perplexing, but also really hopeful about landscape architecture itself is, I don't see enough appreciation of the rural landscape. There is much discussion about the urban landscape and the shaping of the urban open space. I think my sensitivity to the rural or the nonurban primarily comes from the fact that I am originally from an island, Jamaica. My sensitivity to trees and space aligns more with the rural experience. Although I'm a city kid, my sensibilities are attracted to shapes and the forms outside the city. It is very strange that landscape architecture and architecture, that neither profession is in critical conversation about the rural. Through people in the rural environment and groups like the Maroons, we have an opportunity to really unfold culture and local context into new solutions that are applicable to the urban environment.

But to go back to what Austin is saying, Olmsted is problematic. Landscape architecture tends to be presented as if neither land nor people existed prior to whatever is canonized. Somehow Olmsted just came up with the idea, let's bring in some trees. Really? Well, what was on that land before? There were people, and in the case of Central

Park, an economically healthy Black community. So, I agree. There has to be a reckoning with Olmsted, a serious rewriting of Olmsted—every piece of text has to be reexamined, represented, and I think it is the duty of the landscape architecture profession to do that.

WILLIAMS: I agree with both of you. Dorceta Taylor does take Olmsted to task. Check out some of her work. The piece that was on Seneca Village, as it was known. It became Central Park. It's two of my colleagues who were students at the time at Cornell, Leslie Alexander and Angel David Nieves [*We Shall Independent Be: African American Place-Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States* by A. D. Nieves and L. Alexander].

GRANT: Yes, my point about community is also about lowering the academic and professional wall and reaching into the community. Because we only have value as a profession when the community understands what we do as architects and landscape architects. We have to close that gap.

DIANE JONES ALLEN: I second all of this, and I think nothing is a mistake. Austin and I sometimes have these debates because I think

JOOWON IM, ASLA, LEFT; DIANE JONES ALLEN, FASLA, RIGHT



ELIZABETH KENNEDY, ASLA

Kennedy founded Elizabeth Kennedy Landscape Architecture PLLC in 1994. The firm has received more than 30 awards for excellence in design, preservation, stormwater management, and sustainable site design. Kennedy is a recognized expert in the interpretation of cultural sites through landscape design, and is known for her firm's innovative work in green infrastructure. She holds a bachelor of science degree in environmental psychology from the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, where she also attended the master's program in landscape architecture. She has been a research fellow at the Design Trust for Public Space, as well as a cultural specialist on an American Institute of Architects Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans.

PROJECT SHOWN: Harlem Stage—Aaron Davis Hall Performing Arts Center, New York



everything's intentional. But I think the profession intentionally, just like the country, has decided what culture is important and true American culture. The profession of landscape architecture has also decided what culture is the important culture. If you look at who are our icons from landscape history, and you're learning about Kiley, Halprin, Church, and so on, many designers of other cultures are left out. In 2016, they had the landscape architecture forum to celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of Concern [about environmental degradation, led by Ian McHarg in 1966]. And who was up there on the stage?

I was having a conversation on a forum about race last week and some person was saying, oh, I really want to know Black culture. I answered, no, you want to know *your* culture. It's intertwined, right? As if Black culture is something foreign, and it's the same often with landscape architecture, these *Black things*, and it's still happening. There's this little bubble over here as opposed to realizing that it shaped landscape architecture. It is part of the culture of the country. For example, we have our DBE [disadvantaged business enterprises] in practice and say, oh, we'll just bring in a Black person here, or when we have the ASLA

conference, we are going to have a few Black things over there. I think that is how landscape architecture is practiced in America. Just as it has been decided who are the vanguards, and what is the culture that we reward.

Look at what gets awards. Look at when the magazine does its spread on awards, look at what culture is accepted to be elevated. Look what kinds of projects get in. That is one of the problems that the profession suffers from, and why it will be positive if we can do what June's saying, expand the vanguard and address these issues, because we should. As long as the profession and its leaders decide *what* is landscape architecture, and what projects are worthy of celebration in a narrow way, we will continue to be a noninclusive profession, which will eventually stagnate. Right now, African Americans are deemed necessary. These [past] two weeks, every Black landscape architect's probably has been called 10 times, but how long is that going to last? And it's because it's a thing. It's not embraced for the long term. When the person in the forum on race said, I want to know Black history, I responded, you should know history, your history, because it was your forefathers who came over here when a population

was already here and called them Indians. It was your forefathers who brought the slaves, did the redlining. So it's your history. Landscape architecture as a profession has to decide to embrace a myriad of cultures and the possibility that comes with that. Unfortunately, I just think it's decided too narrowly what relevant culture is.

CROSS: I just want to build on that, because I think that goes to this whole discussion about invisibility and abandonment. We can talk about Katrina and the population of New Orleans being abandoned. Through this current pandemic we can talk about communities and states being abandoned and not provided the necessary things they need to help fight this virus. And so, it's a cycle, right? It just keeps happening. And it's a situation where we're good enough to keep domain over, but not good enough to be part of the development of the process by which we're going to be doing things. I think we get pushed to the sides and to the back. I mean, if you look at landscape architecture history, I asked a student if they knew who Dr. Charles Fountain was [a cofounder, with J. W. R. Grandy III, of North Carolina A&T's landscape architecture program], and they had no idea. I was fortunate enough to

have a discussion with Clint Hewitt [the longtime University of Minnesota landscape architecture professor and planner] a couple of years ago. I was invited to the University of Minnesota as a guest critic, and I was connected with him while I was there. I sat and talked to him for about an hour and a half about his journey through landscape architecture, and I pulled out the Black issue of *Landscape Architecture Magazine* [February 1992], and we talked, and he's got Detroit roots and connections. His wife was from Detroit, but he eventually became a campus planner at the University of Michigan before going to the University of Minnesota. So he told me all of this information. Where can I find this in the book? Why can't I find this in a book anywhere?

WILLIAMS: You have to write it, Charles.

CROSS: Right.

WILLIAMS: That's what Toni Morrison said—if there's a book that you can't find, then you are to write it.

CROSS: Yeah. And so, I think we've got a lot of great people in this profession and nobody knows anything about them. We're invisible.

WILLIAMS: I mean, look at Dreck Wilson's work [*African American Architects*]. I think there are about five Black landscape architects and I wrote about two of them, but many of the other ones, I didn't know. I mean, it's just overwhelming. Those are the types of courses that I taught, not in what Toni Morrison would call the mainstream or the master narrative.

Black folks, we've been doing stuff in our area regardless of what they say, from the Black arts movement out of Chicago. So we had both the economic and political, that's why we got the Obamas, that's why we get Oprah, you get Michael Jordan, you get Lori Lightfoot. You get folks...you get people right next to us in Gary, Indiana, like the great Mayor [Richard] Hatcher, [or Chicago Mayor] Harold Washington.

So you have the political, you have the will, you have the funds. We fund it ourselves, much like they did the South Side Community Art Center as part of the Works Progress Administration. It's the last of the arts centers in the United States at the time, and Dr. Margaret Burroughs said, well, we'll just fund it ourselves. So it's still here today. My father was a board member emeritus there, one of the earlier directors, too. But we

need those allies across the board much like you're seeing with this movement now, and they've always been connected. There have always been people with good will on all sides, but not enough to really impact it, really shift. I see all these sculptures being torn down of confederate this and confederate that. I mean, we could even look at the language in horticulture. Most of the things called Black are pseudo—they're false or fake—things that I had to listen to for hours on end, sort of small slights or microaggressions, and so they still exist. We're making some progress, but there's a rude awakening for those who have been willfully innocent and just blind, looking the other way because they've been allowed to. We haven't made it a requirement.

MAJOR: I'm going to start in a different place and hopefully add some depth. I am also going to apologize for using my cheesy metaphors, but that's kind of how my mind works. So, I respond to people who have been calling me all of a sudden, or want to chat and dive into what's going on currently, that it feels like we have all showed up to our calculus final and you just asked the professor what the plus symbol means. And so, I don't know what to tell you or how to help you get caught up,

YIFAN SUN, ASLA, EKLA PLLC. LEFT: JOHN BARTELSTONE. RIGHT

“WE’RE GOING TO CHANGE THE PROFESSION. WE’RE GOING TO REDEFINE SO MUCH ABOUT THE PROFESSION. IT’S GOING TO BE FASCINATING TO WATCH.”

—ELIZABETH KENNEDY, ASLA

because you’re at such a basic level that I don’t know how you’re about to get caught up, and how I’m supposed to know how to fill in those gaps, and so that feels like what the profession does, too, in a parallel way. I think it’s not set up to allow for different cultures to influence it, and I mean that in the way the message is shared, so I wouldn’t just write a book. I think I would look to the culture that is built on storytelling, that’s built around the dinner table, that uses film and art and written words and spoken words to tell its story about what would have to be different to transform the way that we are allowed to practice, how we are allowed to interact with communities, and how we are allowed to archive and sort of make examples of the work. So it wouldn’t just be a book, it would have to be a living, an ongoing, experience across platforms, representative of the communities. I’ve used the term “seen” or “unseen.”

I’ve never been to Africa. I do not identify as African, but I donate to save the zebras and all those animals because I’ve gone to a zoo and I’ve seen them and I’ve been able to make a personal connection with them and so they matter to me. And I think what happens here in America is, we’re not seen. We

don’t even get the luxury of being an animal in a zoo that somebody is tied to. So I ask them all the time, how do you not know? And they say that they weren’t searching for this information or for this history or for these marks of time, and my response is that you didn’t actually have to search, you could have listened to me or to anybody else that’s been saying it forever or you could have trusted us to know our realities. I think if you didn’t hear it, or you heard it and you didn’t believe my experience to be true or others’ experience to be true, then it’s because it doesn’t fit what you have been taught or what feels good or comfortable to believe.

And so I think that’s a really important distinction that would have to be considered, and I think my book would also say, if you want more people in the profession, you need to start building it to support that. How do you do that if you have one of the most expensive degrees? It’s a very long degree, and then your economic outlook on the other side of graduation is bleak. So if you are the child of an immigrant or you’re the first person in your family going to college—or even if you’re working middle class and you have a scholarship—and you say to yourself, I’m going to

go, you still question how much is it to be in this kind of profession that’s going to take...what and how long? A profession that doesn’t even believe me when I tell them my experiences and doesn’t let me present the diversity that they were so looking for in the ways that I’m working.

It’s a hard sell to get others interested in professional landscape architecture, and so I think that would be, to me, addressed in tandem with documenting all of these histories. That’s kind of what’s on my mind. So my book would be a podcast and it would be a film and it would be an invitation to a bunch of different people starting in nursery school to let them know that they matter. I’m trying not to be frustrated with the people asking about the plus sign, because I know that if it weren’t for COVID and all those lives lost, and people having free time because their jobs might look different now, this revolution would not have the momentum that it does. And so I’m trying to capitalize on that, and I hope the profession does as well—that it takes some of the momentum and uses that and the fact that all of these eyes are now available and interested to get them caught up and ready for the exam.



JUNE GRANT, ARCHITECT

Grant is the founder and design principal of blinkLAB architecture, a boutique research-based architecture and urban design practice in Oakland, California, first opened in 2005. The practice is focused on architecture, design, and urban regeneration of cities and communities, and driven by an avid belief in cultural empathy, data research, and new technologies as integral to design futures and design solutions.

PROJECT SHOWN: Apalachicola African American Pop-Up History Museum, Apalachicola, Florida



CROSS: And you know, I just want to say one more quick thing, to build on that. In landscape architecture we learn about the plants, right? I have a prior agriculture degree, so I’ve known about this stuff for a while. We always talk about the importance of diversity in the plant community. When are we going to do that with the profession?

AUSTIN ALLEN: And there’s an interesting thing I hear in a number of these statements, and it gets very specific for landscape architecture, because African Americans and immigrants came into this country to shape the land. We have to change the language, the languages, if you will, because sometimes the voices that Jescelle is talking about are saying things about the land, but because it doesn’t fit into a particular vocabulary, the words are completely missed and dismissed as minor or even wrongheaded about something, when in fact, African American and other underrepresented people know quite a bit about many aspects of landscape but do not articulate them in the same way that the profession has come to expect.

DIANE JONES ALLEN: I think people of culture and color have to—like what’s happening in the streets, right?—we really need to

step up and not wait to be invited in and to take hold. I actually see the same issue with the profession, because often, I’ll see architecture firms and architects doing work now that landscape architects normally would do. I see them getting projects that really should be a landscape architect’s project, and it’s because the work that we do is a lot more interesting in terms of sustainability, water, climate change, and the overall environment. You see a lot of architects going after water projects, going after open space master plans. Because a lot of this work we’re not stepping up to claim, and architects are just taking it, and sometimes clients just don’t know. They’re like, oh, OK, *architect*. So I really think that people of color have to be more like the architects. I was having a conversation about how architecture students are trained in more of this kind of competence, because architects do have this arrogance, and it starts in school. And some of that is awful, but some of that arrogance, I think, landscape architecture needs to step up and claim the things that are really in our purview and the things that we can do best. As opposed to what I see now, and especially in practice, when I see projects getting designed by others that would have been better if a landscape architect had done

them. Or other things you see, architects doing community park engagement and all kinds of work they are not trained for. As landscape architects, we need to step up as a profession. And people of color can’t wait to be invited.

KENNEDY: I think, to build on what Diane was saying and to build on what Jescelle put out in her brief, and I think what all of us have been saying is, the practice as it’s been practiced hasn’t given itself enough space to look at alternatives. For instance, my practice does a fair amount of cultural work, and a lot of it comes from I would say the top-down philosophy to a certain extent, but even when I’ve been on juries and I’ve seen people put forth ideas that fall out of the realm of, let’s say, the orthodox practice, that it’s not considered traditional landscape or it’s not traditional architecture.

And because it’s not formal or whatever is going on in that way, the opportunity to see how this impact is therefore going to shape community is completely disregarded—completely disregarded. And even when the brief to the student is, we want to address food deserts in your community, and this one kid came up with this idea of doing these giant sacks that you get topsoil

BRYON MALIK, LEFT; 3D MODEL SCREEN, BY BLINKLAB, RIGHT



CHARLES CROSS, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Cross is the director of landscape architecture at the Detroit Collaborative Design Center and an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture. His work encompasses cultural asset mapping and park, plaza, and community design projects that incorporate community engagement. As a social justice activist, he maintains the belief that underserved communities deserve good design. He holds a bachelor of science degree in agriculture from Western Michigan University and a bachelor of science degree in landscape architecture and a master of urban design degree from the City College of New York. Cross is a 2018 Fulbright-Hays Fellow.

PROJECT SHOWN: Delores Bennett Park, Detroit (The children's advocate Delores Bennett, who died in 2017, is shown standing.)



delivered in by the cubic yard, and they offload it. But the idea he had was a different scale, so this was accessible in different ways, and this allowed them to capture their own agriculture, microagriculture, and then around this he built all of these systems that stemmed from this one idea. I was fascinated, because you could actually see it happening. The idea was compelling enough and it had enough of a...what do they call it? You capture lightning in a bottle, sort of like, enough of the zeitgeist theories that are moving forward, right? And out of this came a whole sort of reimagining of the domestic configuration of an apartment and to kind of allow you to bring urban agriculture inside. And the rest of the jury was like, this is rubbish. And I thought, well, OK, how much of this is rubbish...just not doable? But, to a person, what I felt that they were not recognizing was that because it wasn't pristine white walls and forms and an abstraction and these diagrammatic exercises of spaces going to nowhere, that it didn't have any validity. And it was interesting that I thought this was the one project that was the most accessible and therefore had the most validity. What disappointed me was that the profession doesn't give itself enough space to see the organic and to understand things

at that level and to understand that maybe there's a lot about what we do as architects and landscape architects that maybe we should back away from, because we're not in a position to do more than initiate or see something as opposed to plan it all the way through and hope that it's occupied a certain way. We're not prepared.

GRANT: I would agree with you, Elizabeth. To give an example of the results of professional inflexibility, there's Marquita Price—Austin, you know her. Keta, a committed and enthusiastic individual who became reflective of the downfall of the existing educational system in operation, whether landscape, planning, or architecture. Keta started studying urban planning at a local community college and dropped out because she wanted to work and solve community problems while studying. However, our programs are not designed for simultaneous work and study. Our pathways to the profession are out of step at a time when our prospective students are action-oriented. We are losing talent! The process where seven to 12 years of study and then maybe five more years working for someone else has nothing to do with the reasons why our students originally became interested in the profession. This is

problematic. We have to change how students are prepared for professional practice. One of the reasons why my office has a 70/30 private/public project split was specifically because I wanted to gain community trust so I could work directly with the issues being faced and help them craft solutions from their perspective. It was through one of the community organizations that I met Keta and learned that a group had decided to address a long-standing stormwater backflow and creek maintenance problem. Led by her, they convinced the county's engineers to sit at the table so that both could mutually solve the problem. When Keta called me for assistance in connecting with an architect, I responded that she should work with a landscape architect.

The point is, communities of color wish to create the environment they deserve, and talent exists in these communities, but we as a profession have not recognized communities as our core clients, and therefore, we are not present enough. The fact that this slightly trained young adult was able to convince grumpy government engineers to collaborate is beautiful. The fact that the project team was missing a landscape architect of color is problematic. I really fault our professions for be-

ing fee-for-service. We need another mechanism. And I conclude my community story by saying that by teaming with the engineers, Keta's team was awarded a \$28 million grant from the state, which will be used for a holistic, community-based solution—a creek upgrade, training for community members on how to maintain the creek, housing for individuals currently living at the creek, as well as expansion of the greenhouse and urban farm currently adjacent to the creek. It was a complex proposal for which my studio provided a diagram. This story, in my opinion, missed opportunities when we are not closely aligned with communities. The fee-for-service paradigm separates us from the very people who need services—communities who have not benefited from the environmental and land-use attention that they should. I wish I could replicate Keta everywhere, and I'm sure there are many Ketas out there. But this is a prime example of where we are failing and community-based people like Keta are succeeding.

LAM: To go around the Zoom again, what does each of you wake up every day hoping for?

AUSTIN ALLEN: Well, June, one of the things you said is that this

all happens at a point, too, where higher education is at a crossroads in the United States and globally. The models that everybody grabbed ahold of years ago—the California System was in 1960, and it seems that time period has come to an end—the three-tier system of the community college, the state universities, and then the big research university. Your example is so on point. There are so many young people who, today, if you asked them whether the institutions of higher education could help them in this evolving process, are like, *I'll do it some other way*. And that is a crisis point. I think the field has to really be open and really move dialogue differently—some massive way of getting back in touch and intellectually exchanging as well as pragmatically changing people, same as the young woman you talked about. I mean, young people have these ideas, and if they just had these added elements that we know would leap them ahead in so many other ways, the dynamics would really pay off very quickly, I think, in ways that may surprise us. And so, I look for those kinds of new alignments to happen.

I think that the pandemic also offers the opportunity for us to understand not only how we do what we have to

do in terms of the viruses, but to understand viruses differently. Because I think we miss the opportunity to really examine and understand viruses as part of the landscape. We've got many viruses that help us to be here on the planet, and so we don't even have that kind of sensibility, but we're gaining it because we're forced to this intersection that's fascinating. And in the middle of all we have seen in the past few months, certainly our discourse on race has to reach back and grab what we need so that we can move in a new direction. I feel it on those streets. Every day, I want to say, OK, what's new? And every day, without fail, something new happens that just encourages me that humans are headed in a good direction.

MAJOR: I'm giving a personal response to what I hope to then be a professional action. Every day I get to walk from my apartment in a house to the beach or just some of the best parks in Seattle. It's really easy to do. And it's not lost on me what a privilege that is, and how much I get from being able to go into these open spaces, especially in a time when so many other things are closed, and I also know that I could never own anything in this place that I am in to experience those things. And I just wish everybody knew all of the

JASON MAAS, LEFT; KRESGE FOUNDATION, RIGHT

systems at play that make that true, and that if, in a landscape architecture program, the cave paintings are important, so are all of the systems at play so that, unfortunately, I can only access this beach because I have a ton of privilege and fortune. And I also hope that we're designing places that, through this crisis, through the social justice movement and all of those things, that maybe make other Black people feel safe and less worried about wearing a mask, not only because they're worried about getting a disease that disproportionately affects them but because they're worried that nobody can see them smiling when they pass them on the sidewalk. And I also hope that eventually we get to be a little less reactive and instead become proactive, and I hope that everything doesn't have to be extreme for people to be motivated or interested, that it doesn't have to be an absolute global pandemic or the most violent of videos of people losing their humanity to get somebody to do something. And I also just can't wait for silence and for everybody to sort of like be quiet or still, and I mean that for myself, too. I can't wait for the day where it doesn't have to—as happy as I am to be doing this panel—that it doesn't need to be me always doing it, that there's just a ton of diverse

voices in the room that will be able to steer. We need a time when there isn't so much pressure for people who aren't going to be about action to say something, because I think there is just this need to be speaking and sharing ideas, even if you don't mean them. If there are enough people in the room who have ideas, and I use "room" very loosely, there won't be a need for those people who don't intend to do anything to speak up, and I don't have to lose my voice in always trying to get a word in.

So that's what I'm hopeful for, for the profession and for the nation, and I think so many people are hoping that there is a singular or unified solution, that there's a thing that all Black people want—and I say that to underscore Diane's earlier point that we are not a monolith, and that what we want is what everybody else wants, and it can't be distilled down into one simple solution. We've always been contributing to and sharing in and building what we want to see for our people, and it is big and complex and requires a suite of solutions. And when you look back at America, that's our history and our design and all of those things you're looking at. So there isn't a Black solution, because we aren't a problem to fix or quiet. I do think there are

solutions for communities and for countries and for citizens across the world, but they have to be approached in that systemic way that allows for the nuance and variation in Black desires and needs.

CROSS: Well, I have a long list, but I'll cut it down some. We're in a situation where there have been a lot of things that have happened from a negative aspect. We're dealing with this virus. We're dealing with the systemic racism, the history that we've had to deal with, being segregated by design, our cities being laid out in ways where someone gets an advantage and is privileged over others. We need to really figure out how we're going to make this a more diverse profession, because there are a lot of things happening in the city, and in some of the rural spaces as well, that need to be addressed, and we need to have Black and Brown people addressing those issues through design. I mentioned to one community partner, if you're not at the table, you're going to be on the menu. So we need to be a part of these discussions. We need to be designing spaces for our communities. I think it's just really important that this profession understands that these spaces need to be looked at through a more critical eye and with the understanding that there



JESCELLE R. MAJOR, ASLA

Major is an associate at BERK Consulting, an interdisciplinary firm in Seattle leading in community engagement and qualitative analysis. She is also the founder and chief strategist of Well Outside, an activism and strategy thought lab. She holds degrees in sustainability and the built environment from the University of Florida and in landscape architecture from Louisiana State University, and she is a LEED Green Associate. Major is a mayoral appointee to the Seattle Arts Commission and a cochair of the Seattle Public Art Advisory Committee. She is also on the board of directors of Sawhorse Revolution, a nonprofit high school carpentry training and community development program.

PROJECT SHOWN: Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan Open House, Port Townsend, Washington



is a group of people who've lived here and who have been here and who struggled to maintain their properties through all the different things that have happened, all these negative aspects of not being able to get home improvement loans and people losing their homes to foreclosure, all these different things. I think it's just very, very important that we make sure we focus on making this a more diverse profession and making it more accessible. I didn't learn about landscape architecture until my senior year in my agriculture program. Had I known then what I know now, I probably would have been in this profession a lot longer. I just really think it's important that we make the profession more accessible so we can invite more Black and Brown people into the room of landscape architecture.

KENNEDY: I think that you're going to see more Black and Brown people approaching this profession, and I think as our numbers grow that the growth might even appear to be exponential. We're going to change the profession. We're going to redefine so much about the profession. It's going to be fascinating to watch. I've been in and around practice since 1982, so I'm coming up to 40 years very quickly. I grew up in the profession because my

dad and my uncles were architects, and it's a long line there. But we're going to change it, and we're going to change it in a way that is similar to what you see happening elsewhere in the world in [what] I want to say are postcolonial societies that are beyond the first generation of colonial architecture, to form a redesign to a more unself-conscious approach to form and development.

And we're going to see the same thing here with this paradigm shift, and I think this is our opportunity, those of us on this call and the growing numbers, to actually shift the paradigm in our communities and not just by waiting for...as Jescelle said, not just to react, but to really make sure that our communities respect and treasure their heritage on the land. I think that's a major understanding that we have to have that we shaped this country. We shaped this hemisphere, quite frankly. And that with that came both an enormous burden, but also this enormous treasure, that it doesn't just get sort of played out hypothetically or theoretically. I think that we have to understand that, as Diane was saying, this is our health. This is our well-being.

The New York City Department of Design and Construction had a

set of guidelines where they said they wanted every project to be seen through the prism of equity, sustainability, wellness, and I always forget the fourth one, and so I'll probably text you at two in the morning to say, this is what it is. But that prism really changed the way that the practitioners of the projects have looked at the issues in front of them. And so, you know, when you become very intentional about these questions and about that framework, and I guess it's close to the intentionality of the framework, it gives you a sort of discipline that doesn't allow you off the hook when you don't stay true to looking at the questions. And so, I think the past few months have been focused now. The COVID question didn't start with the question of race, but it has brought it full center. We are in a moment of racial justice reckoning, and that framework has to be held front and center moving forward in its intentionality.

WILLIAMS: I think it's time for the profession to get real serious. There's been a history... I'm thinking back to some documents that Perry Howard [a past president of ASLA, 2007–2008] gave me years ago when I first was looking into Blacks and landscape architecture. He sent me these old slides of what

LAURA HADDAD, ARTIST AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, LEFT; JESCELLE R. MAJOR, ASLA, RIGHT

“I ALSO HOPE THAT EVENTUALLY WE GET TO BE A LITTLE LESS REACTIVE AND INSTEAD BECOME PROACTIVE, AND I HOPE THAT EVERYTHING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE EXTREME FOR PEOPLE TO BE MOTIVATED OR INTERESTED.”

—JESCELLE R. MAJOR, ASLA

would have been the 1980s or even 1970s, and to see the names of the first licensed Black landscape architects...help me out with the name here, Austin. Tuskegee, Alabama, what's his name?

AUSTIN ALLEN: Edward Price.

WILLIAMS: Thank you. I've got to mention some of these names now. Ed Price. And so, even when Perry Howard was president of ASLA, he had “each one reach one,” I believe, and I don't know how well invested that was as far as ASLA and others—not just ASLA alone. I'm talking about CELA, I'm talking about the sister professions in civil engineering, architecture, etc., to really invest in a couple of levels. One, in academia, in Black faculty. I think 20 years ago, I looked, and there were only like 10 Black people teaching at almost 100 landscape programs in the United States. I happened to be one of them. I mean, we're the ones at certain institutions that haven't been hired. What's going on with that? That land-grant institution, I'll leave it nameless, they'll get the word. What agencies are partnering with democratic practitioners? I mean, we've had community design centers—we've had a number of folks who have championed that to begin to really invest in that, not

just in the classroom, but the town, and get in a relationship with expert citizens I work with right now. Like, for example, RAGE, Resident Association of Greater Englewood. They were the ones working with the city that said, hey, we want the dollar-a-lot program, and it was done, and they're the ones who helped move it forward, some great people in the city. Thinking of other organizations like BIG, Blacks in Green, with Naomi Davis. Folks who are trying to get not just a piece of the pie, but all the Adams and all the Eves, all the music, all the different cultures to the table, including the ones that are bringing us postindustrial revolution, to really bring America to the free labor of enslaved Africans and—Condoleezza Rice would say, the other two sins were the pushing off and removal of indigenous or First Nations [people] from the land—to really get serious about correcting and reckoning. As Randall Robinson [the attorney and founder of TransAfrica, an advocacy focused on the African diaspora] would say, *The Reckoning*. To really reconfigure affirmative action and investment in Black communities. I think we had something post-emancipation about 40 acres and a mule. I don't want a mule, because mules can't reproduce. I want a horse, or something else. I think we've got to

really look at that. So, there's a lot in our history that's there, and I think now is the time, not just [for] Black folks, but everybody, to say, oh, let's really, really get it right. Let's really get it right because we're at a turning point. And Cornel West would point out, in order to save this democracy, because this younger generation, they're not as patient, and they aren't going to wait, because what is waiting—waiting for what? How long is your wait? And so, they realized they're going to go out and protest even though they're going to get exposed to COVID. I mean, that's a big risk, because they're already getting shot. We [had] almost 50 people shot in the city of Chicago just in the last...since this weekend. And so, we're in dire straits. I hope that landscape architects can play their role and play their part and really make an investment.

GRANT: I am more optimistic. I believe it is because of my presence in communities, seeing how well they know the issues, how flexible, how politically savvy they are. But, for a landscape forum, for the magazine, I actually have a request. And my request is to start publishing the works of minority landscape architects—it doesn't have to be a big book. A similar format to *Pamphlet Architecture*, 8 x 8, probably no more than

a quarter-inch thick. I have a liking for this smaller format as it is quick and easy to publish. They are an opportunity for young emerging architects, landscape architects, to have something published. It's so essential to have a publication. It symbolizes commitment and professionalism. I hear you, Jescelle, about the immediacy of new online platforms, but the thing about digital media is, I can hit that delete button and your existence disappears. And that [lack of permanence] is problematic. Currently, when asked to speak on a panel or give a presentation, in lieu of a fee, I request that dozens of copies of a particular book be purchased and shipped to the local library for distribution. This is my new method for improving local library offerings, especially as I will often assign students research topics knowing the shelves have been stocked. It is essential that our work be published, and if we could start with the simple pamphlet sizes focused on minority architects, Black architects, I think we can go a long way to increasing public visibility. That's my request—pamphlet-sized publications of the works of Black landscape architects.

DIANE JONES ALLEN: So, when I wake up tomorrow, what I hope for is—and there's been some great examples you all have given—I hope

for action. For example, Black LAN [the Black Landscape Architects Network]. One thing I appreciate about Black LAN is that it didn't wait for ASLA to make a Professional Practice Network, which we've been asking for for years. So, Black landscape architects said, forget that, we're just going to take action. That's what's happening in the streets, and that action has to move to the public, to making policy, landscape architects and community people taking action. There are a lot of young people, and there are more people of color coming into this profession because of the connection to the land, because they have the ability to take action, and because they realize that this profession solves problems and has a physical imprint that you can see, feel, and touch, which, I think, young people respond to. And that's the thing that connects me to landscape architecture. It provides a method to make change. So I hope that continues and it happens in all kinds of forms.

We have a project right now that's a reality because one woman took action, and we are lucky enough to be working with her. The uniqueness about doing this as a living is that you have to critically think, because we live in this capitalist society. You have to be creative about taking ac-

tion and thinking more creatively as a professional about how to undertake things you get paid for. How do you do that? June gave the example of the grant, but there are all kinds of ways, and I think younger people are more entrepreneurial, and that firms won't be the same. To me it is about making something happen like what we see happening right now. So I wake up hoping every day that there's new action in terms of our profession, in terms of how landscape architects are educated, in terms of how we connect to the evolution occurring in our country, in the streets, in terms of equity, and that the profession continues to expand and create places and opportunities for landscape architects to make a difference. That's what I wish for. ●