

PREFACE

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Cities are laboratories of innovation and creativity. They always have been, but historically those contributions have not always been recognized. In fact, quite the opposite was true for cities, large and small.

Decisions were made for the residents and not by the residents.

It calls to mind the singular Jane Jacobs. In her 1958 essay "Downtown Is for People," Jacobs articulated a certain "design philosophy"—flawed but ubiquitous—that she saw at work in America: the idea that "buildings come first, for the goal is to remake the city to fit an abstract concept of what, logically, it should be."¹

"But whose logic?" is the question Jacobs asked. I am heartened by the fact that today we are harnessing the imagination of those living closest to the challenges to improve lives and revitalize communities.

Our discussions about design intersect with various forms of inequality, from gentrification and segregation and school districts to plans for low-income housing and public goods. From the increasingly expensive penthouses of New York to the empty lots of Detroit to the growing poverty in suburbia to the lack of broadband connectivity on Native American reservations, we are keenly aware of the size and scope of the challenges we confront.

For every building that goes up, or project that breaks ground, or new technology that gets tested, or public arts project installed, there are deeper questions about the systems and structures that allow inequality to continue. Which communities are represented in the halls of power, and whose voices—whose logic—do we value?

This incredible book and accompanying exhibition answers this definitively. We see architects, planners, artists, designers, and engaged community residents are all seeking to address the physical manifestations

of inequality and transform their communities by designing more inclusive metropolitan areas, neighborhoods, and housing developments.

And they embrace the notion that beautiful and functional design isn't just for the elite few; everyone appreciates good design, because it can have a profound effect on the way people participate in their communities—especially those who can't afford alternatives to municipal drinking water, parks, public transportation, and public spaces.

As the number of Americans living in concentrated poverty has doubled since 2000, we must ask ourselves as a nation: is geography destiny? We can see the effects of poverty and inequality in the growing spatial disparities in communities across America. Some are visible in the deteriorated infrastructure and some are invisible, resulting from policies of exclusion.

To create the future that we wish to see, we need bold, smart, and creative ways to turn the paradigm on its ear and lead with inclusivity.

More and more the people who live in these communities are seeking to break down barriers and put forward thoughtful solutions rooted in functional design. It is a profound rallying cry: public works should benefit all. Design, as illustrated here with these powerful examples that transform lives and revitalize communities, can, in fact, be a force for justice.

In a larger sense, if we can address inequality in our physical structures, we can contribute to the fight against structural inequality. Indeed, to build on the words of Jane Jacobs—downtown, and design, are not just for the people. They should be of the people, and by them.

1 Nin-Hai Tseng, "Downtown is for People (Fortune Classic, 1958)," *Fortune*, 18 September 2011, <http://fortune.com/2011/09/18/downtown-is-for-people-fortune-classic-1958/>.