



## Racial Justice Lunch and Learn Meetings

**John A. Powell, author of *Racing to Justice* &  
Professor and Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley**


**Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZjSsuz1yfA> (2020 mins [2 mins])

Bridging: Towards A Society Built on Belonging

**Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9UaVaKtr7c> (2020 [3 mins]) The Circle of Human Concern

Who belongs in the spheres of public and private spaces where the current trend to incorporate companies into belonging while othering the most vulnerable within our society.

**Link:** [\(923\) john a. powell – Creating the Conditions for Belonging and Breathing in a Toxic Environment -](#)

[YouTube](#) (2021 [17 mins]) Bioneers 

Powell is described as a force who shines a light on how we move from othering to belonging. UC Professor John A Powell, Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, presenting in 2021 during the height of the pandemic, racial and political polarization, and in the background of an increasing global climate change asserts, “What we really need right now is the chance to heal and come together.”

Centering “belonging, bridging and breathing,” Powell describes how these apply to the current political, social and environmental stand-offs. As we at Children’s Institute and Rock the Future prioritize wellness, Powell’s words about healing and addressing polarization resonate. “Bridging is basically a process where we recognize another person’s humanity. There’s a South African word called *sabawadu* which means ‘*I see you*’ or *ubuntu* which means, ‘*I am because you are*.’” We are connected and when we see and listen to another person, we feel recognized and begin to heal. Bridging, “has a political dimension, cultural dimension and certainly a spiritual dimension.” Mindfulness is a way forward to bridging and belonging. Powell reminds us of the adage: “In order to do something on the outside, you much first fix the inside.”

Bringing people together for conversation is a first step to bridging. However, “Without recognizing the culture, the structure, the power imbalance, bridging is very hard.” We can’t have authentic conversations with people when there is a power imbalance unless we recognize and address it [a tenet of Cultural Humility]. “It’s not enough to say, “I am a good person. I don’t see hierarchy. I don’t see differences. Those differences are real. They are not biological. But they are nonetheless real... We live in structures and structures live in us.”

Another barrier to bridging is when people believe, “before we can do anything, we have to fix the structures,” by, for example ridding ourselves of capitalism and white supremacy before engaging with, for example, Black people about their deteriorating neighborhoods. Powell argues that in this case, people of privilege concerned with social justice may be, “leaning too far in the other direction.” Now the preconditions regarding the structures and power imbalances prevent bridging for a different reason. The Center for Othering and Belonging advocates beginning with short bridges and entering

into an iterative process that does not say one condition must come before the other; “we do both [engage in bridging while acknowledging structures of imbalance and working to address them] at the same time.”

“All of us have power. All of us have agency and can potentially engage in bridging. Starting where we are and that often means starting small... Bridging doesn’t mean we agree with someone. It’s not predicated on the notion that I’m going to convince,” the other person of their correctness or incorrectness. “It’s predicated on seeing each other, it’s predicated on being present, it predicated on listening, it’s predicated on compassion which means being able to suffer together. Now the research means that when we can do this, we can be fully present with someone, it not only transforms them, it transforms us. So even though we are not doing it for the purpose of changing the person, it is a very effective change agent.” Powell ends with a definition of belonging that includes co-creating spaces, and that, “requires agency, requires power, requires love, and requires responsibility.”

**Additional Resources:**

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/>

Equity 2.0? What is Targeted Universalism and How Does It Address Inequality?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6iSqqNji-l>

Targeted Universalism, Othering and Belonging Institute

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0At2xbQB7w&t=6s>

bell hooks & john a. powell: Belonging Through Connection (Othering & Belonging Conference 2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0sX7fqlU4gQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cs3mtCqC8S4&t=61s> (2015 [26 mins])

John A Powell keynote: The Mechanisms of Othering