

L E A R N I N G   B R I E F

# FHEO Table Talks Series

October 2022

## Advancing Fair Housing and Racial Equity: Why it Matters



## INTRODUCTION

Access to safe, affordable housing has significant positive impacts on a range of outcomes for individuals and households, including economic mobility, health, education, and a sense of community and belonging. Unfortunately, there are numerous longstanding barriers to accessing affordable housing and homeownership for communities of color in the United States that contribute to continued racial disparities in housing and other outcomes.

Advancing racial equity in housing was one of several important topics discussed in episodes of the Table Talks Series, hosted by HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO). This learning brief summarizes discussions related to racial equity in housing from the following five Table Talks episodes:

- Examining Socioeconomic Structures to Improve Racial Economic Equality (May 10, 2021): Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, Chief of Race, Wealth and Community at the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), discussed racial disparities in wealth and homeownership.
- Public Policies and Racial Equality: The Impacts of Policy on the Lives of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals (May 26, 2021): Dr. Reuben Jonathan Miller, author and Assistant Professor at the University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, discussed the limited housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Racial Disparities in Homeownership and Achieving Racial Equity and Fair Housing in Underserved Communities (June 30, 2021): Lydia Pope, President, National Association of Real Estate Brokers discussed strategies for advancing equity in affordable housing and homeownership.
- Exploring the Inequities in Accessing Healthcare and the Impact It Has on Housing Stability (July 14, 2021). This conversation on the intersection of housing and health included two medical professionals: Dr. Tollie Elliott, Chief Medical Officer for the Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc. and Dr. Edward Miller, Division Director of Maternal Fetal Medicine Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Chief Diversity Officer for the University of Louisville.
- Advancing Fair Housing and Racial Equity: Why it Matters (November 3, 2021): Demetria L. McCain, Principal Assistant Secretary of HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, discussed the importance of housing equity and the barriers and opportunities for advancement.

### FHEO Table Talks Series

**The FHEO Table Talks Series**, which began in 2021, is a program of the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The purpose of the Table Talks conversation series is to foster sustainable partnerships with and learn from trusted voices of the community as it relates to Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing. During these table talks discussions, HUD representatives speak with researchers, practitioners, housing experts, community advocates, and other experts about fair housing-related topics such as racial inequity in wealth and homeownership, health disparities, barriers to housing for protected classes, among others. The **FHEO Table Talks Learning Briefs** look across the Table Talks discussions to summarize key takeaways and recommendations that HUD grantees and others can put into practice to actively promote fair housing.

## Background & Context

These Table Talks discussions with researchers, doctors, housing experts, and community activists highlight an ongoing reality – that where one lives is a significant determinant of the ability to thrive. Affordable housing is central to accessing quality schools, healthy foods, medical care, jobs, and overall wellbeing. Yet, access to affordable housing in neighborhoods that offer these benefits is disproportionately limited for people of color in America.

This brief summarizes comments from Table Talks guest speakers related to the prevalence and consequences of racial inequality in housing, the barriers to promoting equity, the opportunities for change, and recommendations for advancing racial equity in housing. The learning brief concludes with a list of resources relevant to the topics summarized in this document.

*“I think that **housing is central to all of it**, quite honestly. I think if you don’t have a home, if you don’t have a place to launch from, if you don’t have stability, you don’t have much.”*

**Dr. Reuben Jonathan Miller**

While the issues described in this brief are important to consider and address, they are limited only to those discussed in the five Table Talks episodes listed above and should not be considered an exhaustive list to advance racial equity in housing.

## Racial Inequities that HUD Grantees Have an Opportunity to Address

Racial inequity related to housing can be seen in racially segregated neighborhoods, the large gap in homeownership rates between white households and households of color, devaluation of housing in communities of color, and policies that limit housing opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. Many of the Table Talks guest speakers discussed structural racism as a significant barrier to racial equity. For example, Dedrick Asante-

*“...even though we think of segregation as something of the past, that’s still taking place today in healthcare and in many other aspects.”*

**Dr. Edward Miller**

*“...racial inequality is not primarily a problem of race relations and of individuals’ personal prejudice. But it is about socioeconomic structures.”*

**Dedrick Asante-Muhammad**

Muhammad, of NCRC, noted that while outright, interpersonal discrimination may be declining, structural barriers stand in the way of the social-economic well-being of communities of color.

By recognizing these problems and barriers, federal agencies, HUD grantees, community members, and others can take meaningful actions to counter them. This section summarizes the nature and extent of racial inequity in housing as described in the FHEO Table Talks episodes and describes some of the resulting negative consequences.

## Inequity in Homeownership

*“...it would take tripling the amount of new Black homeowners every year for 20 years to get African Americans at just a 60 percent homeownership rate. ...we need some radical changes, some deep increases in Black homeownership. And it is going to have to be a long-term commitment. It can’t be a one-year program, a two-year program. But it has to be a 20-year program that is seeing immediate change...”*

**Dedrick Asante-Muhammad**

Many of the Table Talks speakers acknowledge the benefits of American homeownership, including the opportunity to build wealth and provide long-term stability. However, as most Table Talks speakers noted, racial inequities limit the ability of Americans of color to achieve this goal. In [his research](#), Dedrick Asante-Muhammad describes longstanding and significant gaps in homeownership rates between whites and people of color. Since the 1970s, following the adoption of the Fair Housing Act, homeownership rates for Black Americans – ranging from 43 to 46 percent – have consistently fallen well below those for whites, whose homeownership rates have been between 67 and 73 percent during the same period. Homeownership rates for

Latinx and Asian Americans are also well below rates for white households, ranging from 44 to 48 percent and 49 to 59 percent, respectively, since the 1970s.

*“...we do need to focus in explicitly on how we’re going to make sure that people of color are included in [becoming homeowners]. Recognize that the racial wealth divide is part of the legacy of not doing this in the past, and by strengthening housing we can...bridge the inequality and wealth with communities of color.”*

**Dedrick Asante-Muhammad**

### **Racial Bias in Home Appraisals**

In addition to inequitable access to homeownership, homeowners of color tend to have their homes valued below those of their white counterparts. Table Talks speakers Lydia Pope and Demetria L. McCain both highlighted racial bias in the appraisal process as a barrier in closing the wealth and homeownership gap. As McCain noted, “there’s a difference between how the appraisals have been taking place of homes in neighborhoods of color versus white, non-Hispanic neighborhoods.”

### **Limited Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated Individuals**

According to Table Talks speaker Dr. Reuben Miller of the University of Chicago, compared to whites, Black Americans are five times more likely to be incarcerated, twice as likely to be arrested, and more likely to be sentenced to longer prison time,

*“One in two Americans has a formerly incarcerated loved one. This is a giant American problem.”*

**Dr. Reuben Jonathan Miller**

even when the crime is the same. Dr. Miller explained that, because Black Americans are disproportionately incarcerated, they are “more likely to experience the kind of vulnerabilities that come with living with a criminal record.” These vulnerabilities include structural barriers to housing access. Specifically, Dr. Miller noted that there are over 1,000 laws, policies, and administrative sanctions across the country that prevent people with criminal records from

accessing housing. For example, North Dakota has 14 laws, policies, and sanctions that limit housing for returning citizens, including a lifetime ban on rental housing for people with a felony record. Other states have upwards of 60 such laws.

HUD has recognized the need to review policies and practices that limit housing access for returning citizens to promote racial equity as well as public safety (discussed further in the Moving Toward Equity section of this brief).

### **Consequences of Housing Inequality**

A long history of discriminatory policies and systemic racism has limited housing opportunities for communities of color, resulting in a number of negative outcomes:

- **Limited opportunity for wealth generation.** As homeownership is an important source of wealth generation, the disparities in homeownership rates perpetuate racial economic inequality. As Dedrick Asante-Muhammad noted, racial economic inequality is a longstanding problem and “we haven’t seen the economic progress that we would like to see, particularly quantitatively, over the last 40 to 50 years.”
- **Health Disparities.** Limited access to affordable housing can lead to various poor health outcomes. Because housing is more limited for people of color, they also experience disparities in health outcomes relative to whites. For example, in the Table Talks episode Exploring Inequalities in Healthcare, Dr. Tollie Elliot noted that racial segregation and limited housing opportunities can lead to unsafe conditions such as high rates of trauma, mold and other environmental hazards or overcrowding, which has been a particular problem during the COVID-19 pandemic because it has led to high rates of virus transmission. Limited access to grocery stores with fresh produce and safe places to exercise leads to poor health outcomes, like hypertension or diabetes. And, as Dr. Tollie Elliot explained, a lack of access to resources and safe housing also leads to high levels of stress, which negatively impacts health.

### **Moving Toward Equity**

While racial inequities remain prevalent, FHEO Table Talks guest speakers described recent positive changes and examples of promising approaches, detailed below, that may contribute to HUD grantees’ ability to address and mitigate inequities.

### **Racial Equity Now a Prominent National Issue**

In recent years, racial inequity has been elevated as a problem that necessitates national focus and attention. As Dedrick Asante-

Muhammad noted, there is still significant work to do and the general “consciousness about racial wealth inequality has turned from a small circle” to a “conversation that is happening all across the country... and the world is paying attention.” Table Talks speakers noted that disproportionate negative impacts of the great recession and COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color as well as movements like Black Lives Matter, recordings of violent assaults against Black people, and other overt acts of discrimination have contributed to this increased awareness of ongoing racial inequality. Both Dr. Reuben Miller and Demetria L. McCain noted in their Table Talks discussions that the focus on racial equity in recent national discourse provides an immediate opportunity to make meaningful changes to promote equity.

### **Increasing Access to Housing for Returning Citizens**

Increasing access to housing for formerly incarcerated individuals can address racial disparities and promote public safety. As Dr. Reuben Miller noted, studies conducted by the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) have shown that “greater [housing] stability leads to lower rates of recidivism, happier people, and more stable families.” Dr. Reuben Miller also noted that HUD “has begun to allow people with criminal records, through pilot programs... to stay in their homes with their families.” Dr. Miller discussed a specific case where these policies have had a positive impact: a young man with a history of homelessness and numerous arrests who had struggled until he was offered a place to live in HUD-subsidized housing. Dr. Miller credits the housing, and related services, with providing this individual the stability needed to thrive. He notes, “...despite the trauma, despite the grief – he was able to get into counseling and get help for these things – it was the housing [organizations] ... that looked beyond his criminal record and allowed him the kind of stability for him, not only to thrive in his own life, but to do good and help others.”

### **Programs Promoting Homeownership**

Homeownership has many benefits, including, as Dr. Reuben Miller noted, wealth generation, stability, and health and wellbeing across generations. Dr. Miller said there has been “an agency-wide push toward homeownership, toward making sure people are stable,” and referenced a program that allows vouchers to be used for down payments on homes.

Demetria L. McCain also discussed FHEO’s focus on removing barriers to homeownership by improving credit. While homeownership and education workshops are well established in many communities, she described the need to continue these services and to consider programs such as special purpose credit

*“It’s free of charge to sit down with the HUD-approved housing counselor and learn about your credit, to learn about your budget, to understand those steps to home ownership.”*

**Lydia Pope**

programs (SPCPs), which are designed to increase access to credit for underserved groups. In her Table Talks conversation, Lydia Pope, of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers (NAREB) also discussed the importance of community education in promoting Black homeownership. NAREB provides a variety of educational opportunities for people of color. Pope also noted that housing counselors are an important educational resource.

### **Collaborative Partnerships**

In light of persistent place-based inequities rooted in structural racism, HUD, other federal agencies, HUD grantees, and community organizations have been working together to affirmatively further fair housing and implement equitable principles and practices to strengthen communities. Table Talks guest speakers provided several examples of such collaborative efforts, discussed below.

#### **Reentry Housing Pilots**

In his Table Talks discussion, Dr. Reuben Miller described collaborative partnerships between HUD, local organizations and housing corporations resulting in successful reentry pilot programs. These pilot programs, which Dr. Miller recommends be scaled up, have provided housing units for people with felony records and produced other positive outcomes, including a reduction in crime and increased housing stability and well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals and their families.

#### **Collaborations to Enhance and Expand Reach of Healthcare and Educational Services**

Collaborations are also an important way to maximize outreach. Dr. Edward Miller of the University of Louisville described working with local organizations to maximize community access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Demetria L. McCain also described using partnerships to expand reach; she cited a partnership between HUD and the Department of Health and Human Services that is working to provide COVID-19-related resources to underserved communities. Similarly, Lydia Pope noted that NAREB works closely with faith-based organizations in the communities they serve. She stated that over 75 percent of Black Americans are affiliated with

*“I’ve learned that all my passion, all my work... is great, but it pales in comparison to the access that I can get from community trust. So, we have partnered with community organizations... to get this [COVID-19] vaccine as present as possible in these [hard-to-reach] communities.”*

**Dr. Edward Miller**

a religious organization in their community, so these partnerships allow NAREB to provide educational services a larger number of people.

### **Collaborations to Review and Revise Policy**

Different groups have unique and valuable perspectives on how policies and practices impact communities. Demetria L. McCain described a collaborative effort – the Interagency Task Force on Property Appraisal and Valuation Equity ([the PAVE Interagency Taskforce](#)). This taskforce, she noted, brings together “practitioners, people with lived experiences, policy folks” to discuss and address discriminatory appraisal processes. McCain also noted that FHEO has been soliciting input from a range of stakeholders, including grassroots organizations, nonprofits, equal rights advocates, community partners, and state and local government leaders, to gather recommendations to improve the AFFH rule.

## **Recommendations for Advancing Racial Equity in Housing**

The FHEO Table Talks guest speakers illuminated several suggestions for the work that HUD, other federal agencies, policymakers, HUD grantees, and local organizations can do to address racial inequities and further fair housing so that people and communities no longer experience adverse outcomes or conditions based on race. The following is a list of several recommendations provided by Table Talks guest speakers.

### **Implement Policies and Practices that Advance Equity**

Table Talks guest speakers consistently raised the need for strategic work on social policy that carefully considers the impact on marginalized/vulnerable individuals and communities and “goes beyond,” as Demetria L. McCain shared, “changing hearts and minds.” Specific recommendations from the Table Talks episodes included:

### **For HUD Grantees and Community Organizations**

- Implement evidence-based programs that lead to positive outcomes for communities of color. Examples include community homeownership education and financial workshops, programs that provide housing for returning citizens, and supportive housing.
- When implementing new or pilot programs, educate all staff about the goals of the program and any new eligibility criteria or participation requirements. Dr. Reuben Miller noted that “...a lot of wonderful policies and wonderful ideas that are happening at the top or even at the mezzo level in the middle that the community will never get wind of because their interaction at the front line tells them a different story.”

### **For Real Estate Professionals and Community Organizations**

- Engage elected officials and educate them about systemic racial barriers to inform policies that improve opportunities for homeownership amongst people of color.

#### **For Policymakers and HUD**

- Develop and implement policies to prevent discrimination and examine existing policy to prevent exclusion of low-income and communities of color. As Dr. Reuben Miller noted, it is important for policymakers and HUD “to ensure that there are no more predatory practices, like we saw during the great recession that targeted Black and Brown people, but especially Black people.”
- Create and scale-up programs that enable access to stable housing and homeownership for communities of color and promote improved outcomes. Specific examples provided by guest speakers include scaling up the reentry pilots described above, suggested by Dr. Reuben Miller, and reducing mortgage insurance requirements for FHA borrowers and expanding rehab loans, suggested by Lydia Pope.

### **Learn about Racial Inequality in Your Community**

Education plays an important role in helping to recognize and combat systemic discrimination. Table Talks guest speakers underscored the need, **for all housing stakeholders**, to continue to educate themselves about fair housing laws and historical policies and practices. **For HUD grantees**, it is important to learn about historical and ongoing practices that have contributed to racial discrimination in housing as well as efforts to affirmatively further fair housing – nationally, in your community, and in other localities. One resource that HUD grantees and other organizations may

*“Don’t be scared by the immensity of the problem [of racial inequality] but learn more about it and figure out how you can be connected to organizations that are working day in and day out to address this to strengthen [your community’s] socioeconomic condition.”*

**Dedrick Asante-Muhammad**

find valuable is NAREB’s annual [State of Housing in Black America \(SHIBA\) report](#) that describes real estate statistics by race and barriers that impede Black Homeownership.

### **Meaningfully Engage People with “On-the-Ground” Experience**

Several Table Talks guest speakers described the importance of meaningful engagement with the people that HUD and HUD grantees serve. That is, to truly make change that advances the interests of a particular community, **HUD, HUD grantees, and local organizations** should involve members of that community in the change process. Table Talks guest speakers noted that it is

*“I believe in community engagement...that the best solutions we are going to come up with, and the best impact that we are going to have, is going to be by working together.”*

**Dr. Edward Miller**

important to include community members and those with “on the ground experience” in meaningful ways so their unique perspective can inform policy and address the unique challenges each community faces. As Dr. Edward Miller noted, “[Improving health equity] is going to take recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is not going to work for every community, particularly communities that historically have been disengaged and disenfranchised.”

### **Develop Collaborative Partnerships with Organizations Working in Local Communities**

Collaborative partnerships can expand the reach of your efforts and effectively further a common cause by bringing together a range of expertise across organizations. In his Table Talks discussion, Dedrick Asante-Muhammad recommended that

*“Solutions to racial equity are “going to rest with our community organizers, our community activists, our youth, those that have been in the neighborhoods for generations and can tell us and teach us about how neighborhoods have changed from year to year.”*

**Dr. Edward Miller**

**federal, state, and local agencies** develop partnerships with nonprofit groups working in the communities they are trying to serve. He noted, the importance of supporting local organizations of color because their familiarity with the history and presence of discrimination uniquely positions them to develop programs, advocate for policies, and share practices that are informed by the community.



## Related Resources

This section provides a list of resources that were either recommended by the Table Talks speakers or that are related to topics and suggestions raised by the speakers.

### Research

- Dr. Reuben Miller noted that the [Vera Institute of Justice](#) has produced reports on housing access for people with conviction histories.
- Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, along with Jamie Buell and Joshua Devine, authored a report titled [60% Black Homeownership: A Radical Goal For Black Wealth Development](#). The report highlights historic Black homeownership rates and underscores the need to significantly increase homeownership rates for Black Americans.
- This [NAREB report](#) describes how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Black homeownership rates.

### Civil Rights and Fair Housing Laws and Regulations

- The [HUD Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity \(FHEO\) website](#) provides a plethora of information about the role of FHEO, fair housing rights and responsibilities, FHEO programs and initiatives, resources – including laws enforced by FHEO, and information about filing complaints.
- This [fact sheet](#) provides background information on the Fair Housing Act's AFFH requirement and information about the interim final rule, entitled Restoring Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Definitions and Certifications, published on June 10, 2021.
- HUD's [Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Mapping Tool](#) is a publicly available resource that provides access to HUD data.