

FHEO Table Talks Series: Race, Geography, & Opportunity

Host: **Tiffany Johnson**, Director, Policy Legislative Initiatives Division, Office of Policy, Legislative Initiatives, and Outreach, Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Speaker: **Sheryll D. Cashin**, Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Law, Civil Rights and Social Justice, Georgetown University

**Tiffany Johnson:** Hello and welcome to another episode of the FHEO Table Talks Series. I'm your host Tiffany Johnson, the Director of Policy and Legislative Initiatives Division in HUD's Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. In the Table Talks Series, we speak with trusted community voices who share their insights into timely and important fair housing topics. Today's episode will explore the intersections of race and geography, and opportunity in the U.S. We will discuss how the places Americans live can shape their life outcomes—uplifting some and constraining others and often inequitable ways. Here to talk about these issues with me is Sheryll Cashin, the Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Law, Civil Rights, and Social Justice at Georgetown University. Professor Cashin is an expert in residential segregation, and the author of five books, including *White Space*, *Black Hood: Opportunity Hoarding and Segregation in the Age of Inequality*. Sheryll, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

**Sheryll Cashin:** I'm delighted to be here. Thank you.

**Tiffany Johnson:** I'm very excited to learn more about your research in spatial inequalities in America, and to discuss what housing policymakers around the country can do to address them. To begin today, I want to ask you about the term “descendants,” which you rely on in your work to refer to many of the people living in racially segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods. Can you tell us why you chose that term and what significance it holds?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Yes, for me, descendants is a term of affection, an honorific for the people who are trapped in high poverty black neighborhoods. It's an acknowledgement of the unbroken continuum, from slavery to Jim Crow, to the iconic black 'hood. I also use that term to refer to people like myself, who don't live in a high-poverty black neighborhood, but who descend from enslaved people, as all four of my grandparents did. And so, you know, it's an unbroken continuum. The people living in the 'hood, their grandparents were great migrants, right, who escaped Jim Crow to move elsewhere. And the great migrants, some of those were enslaved, formerly enslaved people, but they were only one generation, maybe two away from people who had been trapped, or enslaved. And so, my book, the overarching theme of it is that each time this country seemed to put to bed a peculiar black subordinating institution, it created another one, from slavery to Jim Crow to the iconic ghetto. And I'm showing that continuum. The stereotypes, the anti-black stereotypes have metastasized over time, you know, that are used to justify these subordinating institutions, and I thought it was time to have a term and a lens that humanizes the people in the 'hood.

**Tiffany Johnson:** That story resonates with me. My family is originally from Belzoni in the Mississippi Delta, and they were sharecroppers. But like so many other black families, my great grandfather moved his children to California during the Great Migration for more opportunity. So, thank you for explaining what descendants

mean and the connection to where we are today. When you talk about the connections between these time periods, so the great migration and now, I certainly see my own history and the history of many black families during that time. So, I want to shift a little bit and talk now about why there's so much continuity between sort of the past and the present, and how the Fair Housing Act and other civil rights legislation that were meant to end segregation and race-based discrimination in the 1960s, maybe hasn't lived up to that promise. How is [Cashin begins to answer] it in 2022 that we're still highly segregated neighborhoods, and housing discrimination towards black Americans and other communities of color?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Right, I want to emphasize that, whether you are descendant making 100,000 in middle or high opportunity neighborhood, or an impoverished descendant living in concentrated poverty, segregation is a defining experience for black Americans because of this history. So first off, habits, once they're set in motion, they tend to continue. And the primary response to the great migrants--more than 6 million black people moving--was to contain them in their own neighborhoods, wherever they landed in large numbers, through violence, restrictive covenants, exclusionary zoning, and then to redline those neighborhoods and cut them off from all the kinds of investments that were raining down on majority white neighborhoods. And that's the past, and it's a past that is becoming a lot more familiar to people because of books like Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law*. What I emphasize is that habits born of anti-blackness and segregation endure today through racial steering by realtors, discrimination in mortgage lending, exclusionary zoning, government subsidized affordable housing that's, you know, a housing industrial complex that concentrates poverty concentrates, new affordable housing in neighborhoods that already have more than their fair share, the maintenance of local school segregation boundaries, and frankly, continued resistance to integration of neighborhoods by many, but not all, white Americans. All of these processes I just described are forms of racial boundary maintenance today. So, the past is not past. We have habits and policies that were originally designed to contain the great migrants, but that all of us are ensnared by today. And I argue that, in my book, that we have a system of residential caste that tends to overinvest and exclude in affluent white spaces and disinvest and contain in high-poverty neighborhoods, and only the people who can afford to buy their way into low-poverty majority whites paces are truly benefiting from this residential cast and everyone else, regardless of color, excluded from those high opportunity places, gets a different deal.

**Tiffany Johnson:** That was a very helpful overview. With that history in mind, let's dive into some of the consequences of persistent segregation that you were describing. Much of your work examines the role of place in increasing or limiting individuals access to opportunity. Can you talk about why place is so important to the economic and social mobility and give some examples of how place advantages or disadvantages people's ability to access opportunity?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Many people who live in America know the answer to this question, right. Where you live increasingly is determinative of your life outcomes. And at the extremes of residential caste, I use a metaphor that a friend of mine uses, John Powell. In high opportunity space, it's like you're riding the up escalator. All the systems work to your advantage, you know, and you have concentrated advantages of wonderful well-resourced schools. You're around lots of people who have college knowledge and networks to great internships or jobs. You're near jobs. You have wonderful infrastructure, public transportation that gets you easily to where you need to be. But meanwhile, at the other extreme of residential caste, it's like riding the down escalator. There's

so much systemic disadvantage. Neighborhoods with high rates of poverty, limited employment, underperforming schools, distressed housing, and violent crime depress life outcomes. And so, you know, Raj Chetty's work, the economist, I believe he's at Harvard, has shown that inclusive neighborhoods that have affordable housing, allow poor or lower income or middle-income people to live among middle class people, they tend to have much higher rates of social mobility for poor children. Unfortunately, I'm not going to say that's the exception, but it's certainly not the rule in an America where segregation and the idea that certain types of uses of land and certain types of people should be excluded from the people who can afford large single-family homes, right. So, we have a lot of neighborhoods of low and medium opportunity, with very low social mobility for poor people. That's why I call it a caste system.

**Tiffany Johnson:** So, the connections you described between affluent and marginalized areas, you know, they're particularly interesting to me, since we too often think about these places as being completely detached from each other. You spoke earlier about how these neighborhoods are differentiated through government policy, but I want to dig a bit deeper. An important concept you discuss in your book, and in your work in general is zoning, which is a local tool for governments to use to determine which land uses such as single-family homes or apartment buildings are allowable or not allowable in certain neighborhoods. Can you describe for the audience the difference between inclusionary and exclusionary zoning and how they relate to residential segregation?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Yes, thinking about our previous question, I want to underscore that sometimes, advantage and disadvantage are right across the road from each other. You know, an iconic example is the Delmar divide in St. Louis, or, you know, the main street, I believe it's Main Street in Buffalo. 85% of black people in Buffalo live to the east of Main Street, right, in a neighborhood that had only one supermarket, making it very easy for a domestic terrorist to go find a place where he could spray down and kill people in mass, right. Because there was just one grocery store there. So that's an example, a concrete example of what I'm talking about. Normally, when I give presentations about this book, I put up maps and I show, in countless cities where great migrants landed, these start patterns, right. And how do they come about? Exclusionary zoning is one of the main culprits and what's the difference between exclusionary and inclusionary? First off, what is exclusionary zoning? It's a system of zoning that prioritizes one type of living and land use above all else, and it's invariably detached single-family homes. And you can suffuse your zoning code with requirements that the lot size be very large, the size of the house be very large, the materials used in the house be very expensive, and through those types of ostensibly race neutral requirements, you can zone for the socio-economic destiny you want. Now, new or newish suburbs were more able to take advantage of this, right. And the most segregated suburban communities tend to have this kind of exclusionary zoning in which they don't even zone for apartments, you know, let alone you know, market rate apartments. They certainly don't zone for low income or subsidized housing, right. And they tend to be marked by this kind of exclusionary zoning, plus quite a bit of anti-black prejudice. You know, people will say they're not prejudiced, say they don't see race, but a lot of people have anti-black stereotypes in the recesses of their minds that might be implicit, in which they associate any type of dense housing, particularly affordable or subsidized housing, with black people. They may not say it out loud, but studies have shown that these are the types of policies and attitudes that tend to foment or sustain residential segregation. At the other end, I mean, the polar opposite of exclusionary zoning is inclusionary zoning. And I typically give the example of Montgomery County, Maryland as my poster child for inclusionary zoning. It is has had on the books in that county, it's a relatively affluent county north of Washington D.C., has

had a mandatory inclusionary zoning ordinance since the 70s, I believe. And in that highly diverse county, they don't have a single pocket of concentrated poverty because the zoning code mandates that any development above a certain size has to include a certain number of units that are affordable. And some of them are assigned to the public housing authority, so very low-income people get to live in, you know, mixed income neighborhoods around a lot of middle-class people. And there have been studies of schooling in Montgomery County, they found that children who had been residents of public housing in the county that were able to move to some of these inclusive units and neighborhoods did better in schooling than kids who were left behind in schools that got extra resources, right. So that's a very different vision of how to develop a county. And I guarantee you that Montgomery County registers much higher than a lot of other places on social mobility for poor children.

**Tiffany Johnson:** I appreciate that breakdown so much. It seems like you have a lot of faith in an inclusionary zoning. But I was wondering about what other methods for addressing the affordability issues that often perpetuate spatial inequalities exist? As you know, there's increasing inflation, stagnant wages, and rising housing costs that have resulted in millions of Americans experiencing or being at risk of homelessness. If you had the power, how would you equitably and with a racial justice lens, address the affordable housing crisis that is currently affecting so many places in America?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Well, I appreciate the question, allowed to be queen for the day here. Obviously, I'm sitting in Washington D.C., right. If I had the power, right, I don't but if I did, one, I think it's past time for the federal government to reenter the business of funding massive housing construction, right. European countries have a concept of social housing, we call it public housing, but you know, social housing in, I think, in Britain, where I went to graduate school, they called it council housing, but there was no stigma attached to it. But just building a lot more housing, more starter housing, more dense housing, more range of types of housing, and more affordable housing in an inclusive way. The private housing market, the private constructors, or developers of housing are not building for singletons coming right out of college, for you know, moderate people, you know, moderate income or low-income people. What they're building for is, you know, one-percenters that can afford large lot homes, right. So, I think the federal government should get engaged with building housing for markets and people that aren't being served by the private market. I also think that the federal government, all of its funds, for community development, housing development infrastructure- I think it should be conditioned on the locality that receives the funds to have in place of mandatory inclusionary zoning ordinance. You know if you want this money, you must adopt a mandatory inclusionary zoning ordinance to overcome nearly a century of intention of creating segregated communities. I also would support, this is outside the bailiwick of HUD and housing, but I think we should follow the innovative leadership of cities that have developed pilots with universal basic income and do it nationally now. There are some heartening stories being told recently about how the federal government in the last 15 years or so has reduced child poverty in this country by 60% through income supports, mainly on the tax side. But surprise, surprise, poor folks do better when they're given money. It helps them support family needs. And they spend it wisely, right, and, so building more housing, but also helping people near the bottom of the income scale, or the lower third of it have enough resources to pay on a private market for housing would be a big help.

**Tiffany Johnson:** Those are some very interesting ideas, Sheryll, on self-actualization and helping people you know, cover the gap. On a related note, how can we as a country move towards less segregated neighborhoods and schools, while also recognizing that sometimes that process can produce unwelcoming or hostile conditions for the increased surveillance of people of color?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Well, one thing I want to remind your listeners is that we are, so it's 2022. The effort to contain great migrants began in the 1910s. So, we're basically a century into this intentional construction of residential caste. And for a century or more, you know, for at least a century, or certainly more than a half century, the way in which neighborhoods, the architecture of segregation I should say, has discouraged pluralism, right. So many people don't have to practice pluralism in their daily lives. So, we should not be surprised when, you know, somebody gets the miracle of a Hope Six voucher, I think it's still called Hope Six, I don't know, but gets the miracle of a mobility voucher and is able to move into a high opportunity space, we should not be surprised that they may meet some hostility. So, while you know the ideal mobility programs have a lot of high touch counseling and assistance to the movers to be ready for and able to take advantage of this, I believe that the residents of high opportunity places, they need counseling, right. And I don't think not enough institutions exist today to build bridges, right. I don't know that this is where HUD should be putting its dollars, but I certainly think philanthropies should be putting their dollars into new community-based institutions that have a mission of helping to build bridges and creating a culture of inclusion, right. We've had so much intention around segregation, I think we have to be intentional about creating a culture of inclusivity and integration. I mean, there's some examples of communities that have that culture, like Oak Park, Illinois, Shaker Heights, Ohio, but there's a story there about a community-based institution that had a mission of creating that culture.

**Tiffany Johnson:** Yeah, that's a spot on. So, preventing communities of color from becoming sort of these concentrated areas is a key part of the obligation that jurisdictions have to affirmatively further fair housing. But you're right, that this is difficult and an ongoing process. So, we only have time for one more question. So, I wanted to ask you for a little bit more advice about how HUD grantees can address the problems you talk about. You often speak and write about the next steps for remedying housing inequality are around two ideas, abolition, and repair. Can you describe what you mean by those terms? And what steps can our viewers take, many of whom manage HUD funded programs for state and local governments and housing authorities across the country, what steps can they take to contribute to the abolition and repair of what you refer to as a residential caste system?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Right, so that's the title of the last chapter of the book, and in the previous chapters, I shine a light on three present anti-black processes that constitute residential castes. And I've talked a lot about them, but I just want to reiterate them. One is boundary maintenance, and policies that invest in and retain boundaries rather than disrupt them. The other is opportunity hoarding, over investing in affluent space and disinvesting elsewhere, particularly in historically redlined black neighborhoods. And then the third is stereotype-driven surveillance. And without getting into- the beauty is, once you understand that these processes are going on today, systemically, abolition and repair, it shows a way forward. You just need to do the opposite of what we've been doing. The way forward is clear. We need inclusion rather than boundary maintenance, disruption of those processes, right. So inclusionary zoning rather than exclusionary zoning as a

pointed example. You need racial equity in investments rather than opportunity hoarding, right. I show in the book that some cities, even majority black cities with a lot of black representation are putting three and four times as much money for community investment in white neighborhoods as black ones. Well, with a racial equity lens, you pay attention and purposely budget in a way to be sure that you don't continue to do that, right. So historically, redlined black neighborhoods, and everybody knows where they are, you can find the old red line maps. It's the same neighborhood, right. They should be first in line for new infrastructure dollars, right. Some cities actually formally have a racial equity process built into their budgeting to disrupt these past habits, right. I won't get into how we humanize and repair policing, but that also has to be part of it. But I'll say HUD operated, I mean, HUD funded programs, whether it's public housing or anything else, the recipients of money from the federal government have no business applying a predatory lens to their clients. And I, you know, I can give example of the, you know, the three strikes and you're out and some of the policies that my former boss Bill Clinton supported, right. Once you apply a lens of care, where you see descendants as three-dimensional human beings worthy of the moniker citizen, it frees you up to focus on evidence-based strategies that actually work better than policies of predation. And I have some specific examples of that. But you know, one of them, for example, is giving young men who are caught up in gun violence Urban Peacemaker fellowships, rather than trying to incarcerate, you know, every young man who gets stopped on the street.

**Tiffany Johnson:** I think that's a great stopping point. Thank you, Sheryll, for joining us today and sharing your wealth of knowledge and expertise. Before we conclude, do you have any final thoughts or insights that you'd like to bring up?

**Sheryll Cashin:** Well, I just want to say Tiffany I'm happy you're there. And I'm happy that Secretary Fudge is there. It gives me a lot of confidence about the current direction of HUD, and I think the work you're doing is so important, particularly Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, which we haven't talked about very much, but I think that rule, and the implementation of it, is critical to driving the kind of systemic change and repair that we need to see happen at the local level. And I've been delighted to be with you here today.

**Tiffany Johnson:** Thank you again. I want to also thank all of our viewers for tuning in. I hope you enjoyed this conversation and learned as much about the power and possibilities of place, as we think of all the time here at HUD. If you want to learn even more, check out the resources that we've shared on the Table Talks website. We'll have another episode of Table Talks coming out soon, in the weeks and months to come, and we hope to see you again. Thank you.