

## FHEO Table Talks Series

### Training the Next Generation of Civil Rights Leaders: The Role of Howard University's Fair Housing Clinic

Host:

**DeAndra J. Cullen**

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Special Guests:

- 1. Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.**  
Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Professor of Law  
Office of the Provost, Howard University
- 2. Valerie Schneider**  
Professor of Law  
Director, Clinical Law Center  
Howard University School of Law
- 3. Asiyahola Sankara**  
Former student attorney (Fair Housing Clinic)  
Howard University School of Law

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Hello and welcome to another exciting episode of FHEO's Table Talks series. I am your host, DeAndra Cullen. The Table Talks series was created to foster unwavering partnerships with trusted voices of the community. I'm talking about those voices who speak for people with lived experiences. We want to listen but we also want to learn. April is National Fair Housing Month. This year, we pause, to celebrate the 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fair Housing Act. It is a moment where we remind ourselves that law, this law, is more than just words. It is a charge for action, which results in greater equity for all. We must work together to fulfill the purpose and true meaning of the word fair, as embodied in this landmark law. Today's episode explores the intersection between our work in fair housing and the federal center and the fair housing work done within the walls of higher education. Educators and law practitioners of Howard University in Washington, D.C. are here with me today to highlight the critical role that universities Fair Housing Clinic plays in developing the next generation of fair housing and civil rights advocates, scholars, and lawyers. The Fair Housing Clinic serves as a pillar in the nation's capital. It provides legal services to the underserved while developing students' practical skills and legal careers in public service. Today, I have the honor of speaking with Okianer Christian Dark, Associate Provost for Faculty Development for the Office of the Provost for Howard University. And she's a professor of law at the university. I'm also joined by Valerie Schneider, Professor of Law, and the Director of the Clinical Law Center of Howard University School of Law. Last, but certainly not least, is Asiyahola Sankara, Former Student Attorney of the Fair Housing Clinic. Thank you all for joining me

today to have this especially important conversation about the importance of engaging institutions of higher learning in policy discussions about racial equity in underserved communities. Especially when you consider that these schools are preparing future generations of community advocates, legal scholars, and policymakers. There's enough room at our table for all of these voices. Let's begin this conversation with you, Professor Dark. You know all too well how harmful housing discrimination can be. You experienced rejection of an application for an apartment simply because of the color of your skin. Let's look at a clip from your documentary entitled "Housing Discrimination: Who Should Ever Have to Get Used to That."

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq. in the video clip:** I located an apartment that was relatively near the law school. It sounded like the right kind of apartment in terms satisfying my needs and it had the right price. I called the manager and the manager told me that I should come by and see it. The manager told me that there were two earlier inquiries, both students at our law school, one student I knew because he was in my class. That evening, my student called. He had just spoken with the manager and she asked him if I was black or white. He told her 'she's black but what difference does that make.' And she told him, 'I don't rent to those people, those kind of people.' When I received that telephone call, I had a lot of feelings. There was sense of loss, somehow I had lost part of myself. The only thing that seemed to be there was my skin color, so I felt like I had lost a lot. And then I felt very angry. I was very angry."

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Professor Dark, can you take us back to that moment when you were told that the color of your skin was the reason you were denied that apartment near the law school where you worked.

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.:** Yes, I certainly can even though it has been many years. I received a call from one of my students and he had had the conversation with the landlady. He called me because he was deeply concerned about what she was asking and when she asked the question whether she was black or not, she was asking about me. And he said well yes she is but what difference does that make. And she made it clear that it made all the difference. I can't rent to her. I can't rent those kind of people. And I remember when I heard him repeat what she said that it was as though I had left my body. And that's all that was there really was who I am, the kind of person I am, the fact that I was a law professor, the things that I had achieved, none of that was relevant. Just this body that was black and black in the way that she found abhorrent was there. I remember having to shake myself back into sort of the presence because in speaking to my student he was apologizing. I realized he was apologizing to me for having to even participate in the conversation. He was so upset and of course this is a white student. And that's why she chose him. And I found myself trying to reassure him that nothing she said at all reflected on him. He was not the person who had violated the law. He was not the person who had discriminated against me. And it was, there was a mix of feelings. I was angry, I was upset. I was lost. I was feeling like I had gone back in time because this is Richmond, Virginia so I'm feeling like I've lost all these rights. I'm not even a person anymore. I'm property. So it was a lot of different feelings. And in my experience as an Assistant U.S. Attorney where I ended up handling housing discrimination cases. Anytime I could, anytime I spoke with someone who was victim of housing discrimination you could see the impact that it was really having on them. One time I spoke with a woman who all she, every time she talked about what happened she shook. She was like, she was shaking herself to steady herself because she could not handle the discrimination.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off, I just wanted to – one question I wanted to ask you. You mentioned that you had been representing clients who had similar issues. I want to if you don't mind I want to go back to another clip from your documentary where you talk about the action you took as a result of the blatant discrimination that you experienced so let's take a look at the clip for a second.

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq. in the video clip:** Never had I suffered an insult of the magnitude that I suffered with housing discrimination. Never had I felt a need to bring a lawsuit because I had suffered an insult. The way I like to describe it I sometimes use an illustration. If you could imagine a piece of paper. This piece of paper has all the information on it about you. It contains more information than a resume would because it has your very essence. It has information about you that you feel is so critical to who you are. And essentially what happened is the landlord looked at that piece of paper and she didn't like the color of the paper and she crumbled it up and she threw it away. And so I spent the next two years unfolding, smoothing, trying my best to get the creases smoothed out so that the piece of paper would look almost like the piece of paper it looked before it had been tossed out. I'm still pressing that piece of paper. I'm still working on the creases. I know that it'll never be the same. But I had to bring the lawsuit for another reason. If she could do this to me, then she could do it to others.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank you Professor Dark. You use the metaphor in the documentary, the piece of paper when you describe the impact of the discrimination you endured. Do you think that your efforts to unfold and smooth out that very piece of paper that the landlord crumbled up and threw out shaped you into the changemaker you are today?

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.:** Well, I think it certainly has an impact in causing me to be much more of a as you describe, a changemaker. I like to think that I was already doing that work as a professor, as a teacher. But what I found is that with the fair housing, with this particular experience is that I had to tell this story. I had to tell my story to as many people as I could to really get them to understand that discrimination is not something that you just get over. That it has its marks on individuals just as it does on our society. And that we cannot tolerate it. We can't live with it, it's too, because of the harms that we not only individually experience but also because of the harm that it caused to our community at large and so I found myself moving outside the classroom into the community at large to try to make a difference in this work.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Did you know then that you would devote your career to helping others as you've done in the various roles that you mentioned earlier throughout your career?

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.:** Well like I said, I always thought I would be doing helping others because I'm a teacher. I did not however expect that my story would have the impact that it has had. I think mainly because people sometimes with when you, when people encounter a story around discrimination they find ways to blame the victim. Well, they really couldn't have afforded the apartment or well they had a criminal record and that's really the reason and with me, what's the reason. I could afford the apartment. I had worked hard to achieve the position I was in. I wasn't, I didn't have a criminal record. What, what was it? What does, it was just her view of what being black meant. And that meant that there was no excuse but to look at the unadulterated ugliness of racism. And that has helped to have the conversations that we need to have, not blame the victim. I

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** I couldn't agree more. And I so appreciate that conviction. You've an illustrious career in law and advocacy, including your role as you mentioned at the Department of Justice as a trial

lawyer and as a Commissioner of the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. Your career spans over three decades. Let us spend some time talking about your art in the establishment of Howard University's fair housing clinic, almost 20 years ago. What inspired the launch of this clinic?

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.:** Well, we had a Dean, Dean Kurt Schmoke, who was very interested in expanding the clinical opportunities for our students. And to do that in areas where we really could have a social justice impact. Coincidentally, we had an official from HUD approach us about the possibility of having a clinic and we were immediately excited about that possibility. We also had a director of our clinical programs at the time, Tamar Meekins, the late Tamar Meekins, who had an extensive background and held as a public defender and was very socially justice minded. So let's just say all of the cards came together properly and we were able to launch that clinic and from the beginning we launched it with an emphasis on not just bringing the cases which is important and representing people who have been discriminated against under the fair housing law was clearly important for developing our students into future lawyers in this particular area, this field. But it was also important that we get and educate the public about the law so there were lots of different ways that we reached out into the community. Fortunately, we've also, we now have another excellent director of that fair housing clinic. Professor Valerie Schneider and under her leadership, we've expanded the kind of work the different kinds of work that the students do in the clinic. So it white it may be litigation, there's also policy opportunities, policy development opportunities for the students as well and I've just, and opportunities in terms of when you look at the litigation not just at the trial level but they've even had comment on Supreme Court case. I think that her leadership has given us the possibility of really expanding the training for our students.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Well, I think that's a great segue for us to introduce our next speaker and bring her to the conversation and that is Professor Valerie Schneider. Thank you so much Professor for being with us today.

**Valerie Schneider:** Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** You are the Director of Howard University's Clinical Law Center. In this capacity, you oversee nine law clinics including the Fair Housing Clinic, is that current? Nine clinics?

**Valerie Schneider:** That's right.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Wow. That is amazing. And -

**Valerie Schneider:** They're all, I have to say all of the clinics hold a special place in my heart. We've got clinics that are doing amazing work across a huge variety of social justice areas but I came to Howard to do fair housing work so the clinic has been incredibly important to me. It's why I went to law school was to do this type of work and I've really been at Howard for a decade now and I've really gotten to see the impact that our students have made both locally in our community and nationally as well.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Well, that's wonderful and I know we wish, I wish had time to talk about all your nine clinics. But we do have time to talk about the Fair Housing Clinic as you mentioned. IT's just extraordinary to me if I might say that you manage so many clinics with such an important mission statements. Professor Dark talked about the launch of the Fair Housing Clinic. I would like for you to talk to us about the mission of this clinic. What does this clinic do?

**Valerie Schneider:** Sure, so at the Fair Housing Clinic we really see it as a housing justice clinic. And in order to achieve housing justice we have to take a multi-pronged approach. And so as professor Dark mentioned, we do a lot for individual client representation. So we represent, we have students who are, have special permission form the courts to appear on behalf of clients even before they're members of the bar, so as they're supervised by our attorneys within the clinic they can serve as student attorneys for individuals who are facing all sorts of legal problems related to their housing. So we do some housing discrimination cases, we also take on housing code violation cases and we really see those as anti-displacement, anti-gentrification work. WE do some eviction defense work and really it runs the gamut of types of housing justice work and then as Professor Dark mentioned, in addition that individual client representation, we do a lot of law reform work so we testify at city council meetings, we have submitted responses to or public comments to proposed HUD rules. We've submitted amicus briefs in appellate cases related to housing justice. We've mooted cases, Supreme Court cases, related to housing justice at the law school so that students have the opportunity to really leverage what they're learning with their clients on a local or national scale when they're doing law or firm work. And then in addition to individual client representation and law reform work we also do a lot of education and outreach so our goal is to empower our clients to bring the microphone closer to our clients' voices and to turn that microphone into a megaphone.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** That's amazing, especially seeing that, you know that's an area that's very near and dear to my heart and that' education outreach, so I appreciate that. This clinic as you mentioned provides legal services to residents in the Washington, D.C. area. With housing discrimination allegations based on the seven protected classes, you know there's race and color, national origin, religion, sex which includes sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, and family status. I know that there are states around the country that provide additional fair housing protections. In the District of Columbia, are there additional fair housing protections that you can talk about?

**Valerie Schneider:** Sure, there are. The District of Columbia has a number of other protected classes in addition to the ones that you mentioned. And part of the goal of having additional protected classes is to really think about what should housing providers be allowed to consider when someone applies for housing. They should not be allowed to consider race for all of the reasons that Professor Dark just talked about. And any of the other protected classes that are part of the federal law but in DC and other jurisdictions around the country legislators have said well there are other things that housing providers are really not relevant to the you know to the decisions housing providers are making so they shouldn't be able to think about someone's political affiliation, they shouldn't be able to discriminate based on somebody's appearance in addition to their race. And in DC and a few other jurisdictions, there's also prohibition on considering source of income and that means housing providers can consider to the extent it's relevant how much income a person has but they shouldn't be able to consider where that income comes from. The reason for that is we find you'll see if you look on websites that advertise rental housing you'll see lots of advertisements that say no section 8 voucher applicants allowed, right? So no government support applicants allowed or income or you know your rent must come from income not child support not alimony not any other source and that really is a barrier to many of our clients who are seeking housing particularly in environments like DC where there's a real affordable housing crisis. And so if somebody has a section 8 voucher gets turned away and turned away and turned away, even though they can pay for with a very, very reliable, government is paying a portion of their rent, a very reliable source of income, if those doors are closed to them we're losing you know part of the fabrics,

the fabric of our communities. It displaces people out our communities and there's a incredible loss there and so one of the types of cases we see fairly frequently in the clinic is source of income discrimination.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank you for that. My next question but you've already answered it so really brilliantly and that is what does this protection mean for someone in DC who's looking for affordable homes so I appreciate your response to that. You're already anticipating my questions, which I love. Can someone with a housing discrimination complaint come directly to the clinic for assistance or home can someone find get help with the fair housing clinic?

**Valerie Schneider:** They can so you can look online at the clinic website on the law.howard.edu webpage, you can find the clinics there. There's an online form that you can fill out and you can also find our intake phone number where you can leave a voicemail message and then very quickly you'll have a law student give you a call back. One thing I'll say is we get many, many more requests than we can provide than we can provide in our clinical law center. But one thing we really try to do and I really take this from our former Director Tamar Meekins, we care for each person who calls us at Howard as is they're a member of our family. So even if we don't have the capacity at that time to take your matter or maybe we don't have expertise in that particular area of law, we really try to shepherd people to call us to a resource that will actually be helpful. We try to care – I always say to students who are answering these calls, imagine how you would want your family member to be treated and please try to treat, do your best to really not just give somebody a phone number of a website but shepherd them through the process if we can't help them directly.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank you for that. Why do you think the fair housing clinic is so important to the community, especially now?

**Valerie Schneider:** Yeah, that's a great question. There are a few reasons: one as said before, the fair housing clinic's goal is to bring a microphone close to the voices of our clients. And it's an incredibly critical time to amplify the voices of most affected by housing policy. And also, locally in DC, we are in the midst of the affordable housing crisis and that's displacing families at an alarming rate, and it's such an important time to stem the tide of displacement. The families and individuals that are affected by housing policies. And you know I was at a conference a while ago, and I wish I could remember the speaker who said this analogy because it stuck with me. They made a great analogy to the laws of physics, I vaguely remember from high school that there was a law of physics that objects in motion stay in motion. In this country, we have had centuries of government enforced housing discrimination, you know that created an object in motion, a force to be reckoned with, and we can't just now take our hands off that ball. We need an equal and opposite force, a force fighting for housing justice, and I really see that the housing clinic is one small player in a huge community of housing advocates including those in your office of course, who are really working to stop that force and push it in a different direction. And I like to think of our clinic as part of that story.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** I like that! Thank you for sharing that story, I'm going have to use that. What drives your students to have the skills and training necessary for providing legal services to underserved and marginalized communities?

**Valerie Schneider:** Yeah, I have to admit it's a little bit selfish because now that I have been doing this work at Howard for a decade, I'm often calling my former students as colleagues to ask them for advice

on cases, asking them for their opinions on policy initiatives and things like that. So some of my former students are colleagues and mentors of mine. So part of it is selfish, and you know, working with Howard students is the greatest fun and the greatest honor I can imagine in my career. Each year I learn as much from my student as they do from me. One of the really rewarding parts of the clinics is seeing students make a career long commitment to housing justice advocacy, whether they focus their entire career on that. We have got students working in DC at the office of tenant advocate. We have students at federal agencies, legal aid, all sorts of legal services providers here in DC and across the country. We have other students work for firms or other types of their sub-services, and move away from housing but then day one of their career, the moment they pass the bar, they are capable of making a difference through taking on pro-bono cases, through participating in conversations about housing justice, through advocacies and other avenues as well. So, my goal, I see the clinic as having this ripple effect and the ripple effect has sort of coming to back to me and my direction as well, so that's been really wonderful to sometime rely on students and refer potential clients. And we have some clients who aren't eligible for services in our clinic because they are not income eligible, and I refer them out to former students of mine and that's been great.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** That's amazing. I always think that the success of professor sometimes can be measured when the teacher becomes the student. So, it's great that you say you now have former students that you can actually go to for counsel and consult. I think that's amazing.

**Valerie Schneider:** It's about to happen with Asiyahola, who's graduating soon, I'm sure there will be many times when I call him up for advice on various issues.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** That's awesome. Actually, I think that's a good segue that we are fortunate to have the opportunity to talk to one of your former students. Thank you for being with us today Asiyahola Sankara. You're a soon to be graduate, is that correct? You're about to graduate from Howard law school and the fair housing clinic. So that's exciting. I know that you're just thrilled to be able to have this as one of your accomplishments in your career. Before in law at Howard though, you worked in Los Angeles organizing campaigns to raise equitable development and inclusive land use standards for the city. How did this influence to attend Howard law and work with the fair housing clinic?

**Asiyahola Sankara:** Yeah, thank you so much for having me. And my work in California was focused on equitable development and I was a community organizer. I worked with local residents who were challenging gentrification and inequitable development patterns in their communities. And were pushing back, were putting their own people centric plans forward for how new housing should be constructed in the neighborhood and how existing housing should be treated. So the experience was a grassroots experience, I was working with people who were themselves experiencing deteriorating housing conditions, who were dealing with, essentially slam lords and who were fighting on that personal front for fair housing and for safe housing in their own lives and were also taking leadership positions in their own communities to call for transformative policies that in the long run lower the need for these clinics that exist in the first place. So that experience was really powerful for me, because a part of my job was developing residents as leaders, and working with them to develop their skills set, so over the years, as they would win these policies campaigns and as they would hold their own landlord accountable, that they were building themselves up so that they could have an even more powerful impact on future campaigns. So that experience for me really put in focus the importance of skill development generally and as an organizer I felt for a while that I wanted to go back to school and

develop myself as well and develop and increase my own toolbox, expand my toolbox. And I felt that having the experiences that I have, working with grassroots community groups and working as an organizer, I felt that those would be valuable skills to bring into law school and complimentary skills that would work while legal training. And also, having worked closely with attorneys as an organizer, it was really inspiring to see what we could accomplish when those disciplines were brought together and harnessed towards the same goal. So, looking at the possibility of going to law school, I felt that that presented an opportunity to you know come on as a bridge builder basically as somebody who has this training as a community organizer and is committed to working as an attorney in the future with other community organizer to fight for fair and just housing.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank you, that's amazing. Our primary goal of the fair housing clinic is to develop the next generation like yourself civil rights attorneys and advocates. How has your experience with the clinic impacted your career and education endeavors?

**Asiyahola Sankara:** Dramatically. And to be clear I came into the clinic confident, one hundred percent certain that I did not want to do litigation after I graduated. And I remember telling Professor Schneider this, you know, I went into the clinic almost as if I wanted check that off my list. To experience what it felt like to litigate, to be sure, that yes, this isn't what I wanted to do. I felt like I wanted to do movement, transactional work. And so, for me the experience was, a total 180, because I went in with that attitude and I was like oh no, I definitely want to do litigation. And you know part of the aversion for me was coming in, having experience with the law that you know didn't feel as though, the courtroom was frequently conducive to just outcomes. I had been a defendant in a case involving nonviolent civil disobedient, and after that I felt like I never wanted to see the inside of a court room again. But in the clinic, we were representing clients, representing renters, and we were working with them to challenge the totally, totally, horrific situations they were dealing with as a result of having these really unscrupulous landlords. And in many cases we were able to work with the clients and take their landlords to court and force them to, you know, in certain cases invest tens of thousands into abating court violations and to getting rid of lead and to get rid of mold and repairing broken doors, installing new sinks, fixing broken stoves, all of these things that are easy to take for granted if you are person who doesn't have to think about turning on the stove and having it worked or walking into your kitchen and having a fridge at all. So that experience really profoundly shifted the way I thought about litigation and now having gone through the experience and getting ready to graduate, I'm really committed to being a litigator after I graduate and continuing down this career educational path that the fair housing clinic has set me up for.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank you. So, word is you're about to graduate so work with me for a second here. You are about to graduate from the law school and fair housing clinic, it's five years, where do you see yourself in these next five years. And in answering this question, do you see a future in fair housing law or other legal careers in public service? I think I might know the answer to this but let me hear what you have to say!

**Asiyahola Sankara:** Absolutely. I'm moving back to Los Angeles, the city I called home for ten years before I came to law school. And I absolutely will be working in public service, in public interest. And a part of the work I'm going to be doing will be with grassroots community organizations that are working on fair housing law, that are working on all kinds of issues related to housing justice. And so that's really inspiring for me and what I'm probably mostly excited about is working with groups that are doing all



kinds of work across all kinds of silos. And I think that where we are at today in 2022 it's really clear that there's no way to really parse out these different issues, for example, to separate fair housing from access to transportation or to separate fair housing from good quality jobs and economic development in the community. So, I'm excited, I'm interested, I'm committed to within the next five years doing as much work as with local grassroots organizations that are bridging those divides and that crafting innovative strategies for how to achieve a future where fair housing is no longer an issue for anybody.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** In your opinion, how can institutions of higher education, specifically historically black colleges and universities or HBCU's further develop the next generation of civil rights leaders, educators and fair housing practitioners. What are your thoughts on that?

**Asiyahola Sankara:** That's a great question. I think that Howard does that so much already. I think that institutions like Howard and Howard itself could build on what they are already doing by doing a few things. One, I think really centering the history and legacy and teaching that legacy when it comes to civil rights movement and other liberating movements based here in the United States that so many influential leaders from those movements were produced by HBCU's. So, I think this is a legacy that schools like Howard are certainly proud of and I think one that can be done is making sure when students are coming in first year they are aware of that legacy and how important it is to the institution. And two, more specifically around fair housing, I think that teaching what other disciplines are available and beneficial for attorneys to be working with. So, for example, so many developments occurring around technology and I had a colleague I was talking with a month ago who was sharing he's working on a fair housing project or excuse me, already developed a website that tenants could log on to and put in their address and see what other properties across the city are owned by that same landlord. So, it's a project that's trying to pierce the veil of limited liability corporations and all of these things that sometimes property owners use to stymie tenants from holding them accountable. So, I think that's great, that's wonderful. As somebody who just received three years of legal training, I know that's not something that I can do. You know, I sometimes can barely keep up with my own email much less create a website, right? But that's a discipline that can be so complimentary to what public interest attorney, fair housing attorneys are doing, and I think that just giving students a general sense of what other disciplines are there and how they can work with the legal practitioners to achieve the same goals, I think that could be a powerful strategy as well. And then finally, just encouraging students to get involved with local organizations, local activism while they are students, whether they participate in those efforts through a clinic or not, I think that is a transformative experience. I know it has been for me in my life and something that most students can benefit from.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank for that, Sankara. I'm gonna ask this next question to you Professor Dark if you don't mind but any of you all can respond, and that is: as educators and advocates for fair housing and racial equity, what can we do at HUD to better engage the Howard university community, and other college towns around the country, for instance. What can we do to better engage those institutions?

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.:** Well, I'd like to start with... Should I start with money? Because, let's talk about your funding arm that made it possible for us to establish the fair housing clinic and there could others, there are many other institutions. So, I think that I want to encourage HUD to be a little more proactive in reaching out and suggesting that the need is great, and clinics can be created at law schools or in conjunction with other community partners, like nonprofits etc. that are already doing the work, fair housing groups that are doing the work and need more support, financial support as well. I assume

that you already created internships and externship opportunities, but that would be a good thing, not just for law students. But I want to pick up on Sankara's point about crossing the silos, and maybe including students from other fields in the work of HUD. And while you did not ask this question, I'm gonna say it, to answer the question what direction should our fair housing clinic perhaps go in the future? And the suggestion again, because Sankara's got his finger on the right point, about the need to break these silos down. Housing does not... the problem around housing and discrimination in housing doesn't just exist in one field. Typically, we need to think about ways to include those who are doing environmental work, those who are doing work around health and health science area because there are health impacts here. Let's talk to the architects who are using universal design to make it possible for accommodations, make it possible for those who need accommodations to be able to have a wider selection of housing choices. Let's engage the engineers, let's engage the social workers, "Hello Sankara, I'm going to talk about that litigation now." Because they can help us help get victims to tell their story. They have a set of skills and tools to be able to help them get through some of these emotional barriers that can exist when someone is discriminated against. That would be powerful to have social workers working with the attorneys on these cases. So that's when I see the future, I would see the housing clinic would look more like the entire university, working together, with students in those fields.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Absolutely, working together. So Asiyahola, why do you think it's important for HUD to partner with HBCU's and other minority serving institutions. I heard Professor Dark's response, which I thought was fantastic, but from your perspective, what are your thoughts on that?

**Asiyahola Sankara:** I think it creates an enormous opportunity for students to learn firsthand while they are students what it is that HUD does, why it's important and make a case for a career in fair housing after they graduate. I came into law school a little bit on the older side as far as students go, I'm 33 now. So, I was fortunate that when I was coming in pretty much knowing generally speaking what I wanted to do but I think a lot of students come in to law school, other professional schools straight out of undergrad and they are still figuring out what it is that they can see themselves doing for the rest of their life after they graduate. So I think HUD working with HBCU's would create an enormous opportunity for students to imagine what that would be like as a career after graduation. And I think for black and brown students in particular, other students coming from low-income communities, there are so many students at HBCUs that are impacted by the issues related to fair housing. I think that HUD creating and strengthening those connections with the schools, with these students could be a really, really important part of creating that pipeline.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Thank you for emphasizing that importance because you're absolutely correct. I really appreciate your perspective on this, I think that there's much work to do but together we can get a lot of great things done. Are there any last thoughts that you all would like to briefly share with our audience before end today's program?

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq.:** I don't have a lot and I don't know if you recall the last thought, but I do have a quote that I hope sticks with folks, and its one that comes from the former president of the children's' defense fund, because I think that it's important to think about that your work, this work can be big and can also be small and still have huge impacts. And the quote goes: so often we think we have to be a big dog in order to make a big difference and that's simply not true; we just have to be little persistent fleas for justice; enough fleas biting strategically can make the biggest dog uncomfortable:

the dog of racism, the dog of sexism, the dog of discrimination, and transform the biggest nation. We are sending students to do that, transformative work. Because we have a fair housing clinic.

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** I don't even know if there's anything else that needs to be said! We are going after that dog, I promise you, we are all going after that dog. Thank you all for joining us at the table. I want to close this program from a final clip from Professor Dark's riveting documentary. Thank you, professors Dark and Schneider and former student, or actually soon to be former student attorney, Asiyahola for being with us today.

**Okianer Christian Dark, Esq. in the video clip:** "And every time an individual is harmed by housing discrimination, so is the fabric of our society. One more blip, one more insult that the society has to somehow absorb because another member has been cut off or in some way been damaged in the society. All of us hurt, discrimination is not a little matter. It's not just something that happens, and you get over it, or it's not something that just happens and you get used to it after a while. Who should get used to being degraded? If someone doesn't stand up a lot of people stand up and say, "enough is enough, you cannot withhold something as vital as housing from someone just because of the color of their skin, national origin, or whatever it might be" then I think we are letting down all of those other people who sacrificed for us. Some of them who gave up their lives and it was such a small thing for me to do in a way..."

**DeAndra J. Cullen:** Until our next Table Talks, remember fair housing is more than just words, it's the law. Take care everyone.