

LAWYER PERSPECTIVES ON RACIAL EQUITY IN THE  
COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE PROFESSION

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The persistent underrepresentation of African Americans in commercial real estate suggests a need for a racial equity lens. To better understand this underrepresentation, prior studies have nationally surveyed black professionals to gather their perceptions of opportunities in the commercial real estate industry and discrimination in housing markets. Some findings suggest black professionals respond to institutional pressures by focusing on niche markets in minority or segregated neighborhoods and predominantly on minority clientele. While these findings are insightful, the problem is that the attributes of diverse institutional pressures beyond access to financing are not well defined or understood in the literature. As a result, efforts to adapt or reform the formal barriers to entry for black professionals in the real estate industry have, in some circumstances, not achieved the intended or predicted results. In this project, we draw on institutional theory to inform a study of the perceptions of real estate lawyers doing business in the Jackson, Mississippi metro area about formal legal barriers and informal social judgments that impact the entry, performance, and exit of black professions from the commercial real estate industry. In our research, we nuance the distinction between “formal” and “informal” institutional pressures. We also nuance the distinction between “general” and “transaction-specific” stakeholder attitudes.