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FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES



Dedrick Asante-Muhammad

President

Expert in: Racial wealth divide and racial economic inequality

Dedrick Asante-Muhammad is president of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Dedrick has spent 20 years dedicated to understanding and tackling racial and economic inequities, and as a result, was recognized as one of TIME's Closers.

He has worked at many of the nation's top national non-profit advocacy organizations including the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, Prosperity Now, the NAACP, Institute for Policy Studies, Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network, and United for a Fair Economy. Previous to his work at national non-profits, Asante-Muhammad worked in higher education at Williams College, Oberlin College, and Morgan State University. He also helped coordinate a college program at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women.

While at United for a Fair Economy, Asante-Muhammad co-founded the State of the Dream report, an annual publication honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that examines the state of racial and economic inequality in the U.S. Asante-Muhammad has continued to be a co-author, providing analysis in publications, including "The Road to Zero Wealth" and "Ten Solutions to Bridge the Racial Wealth Divide."

Over the years, Asante-Muhammad has also become a thought leader in diversity, inclusion, and procurement, as reflected in the Opportunity and Diversity series and the "Racial and Ethnic Representation and Investment Framework for the Banking Industry."

Asante-Muhammad has served and serves on various advisory committees and boards including The Racial Equity Subcommittee of the Joe Biden Economic Policy Committee, Better Markets, the Advancing Black Strategists Initiative, and the Council of US Financial Health Network. Asante-Muhammad has a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Government from Williams College and a master's degree in Systematic Theology from Union Theological Seminary.

Asante-Muhammad has been featured in outlets including The Hill, MarketWatch, Yahoo! News, Bloomberg, CNN, MSNBC, Time, The New York Times, C-SPAN, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Atlantic, TheGrio, Black Enterprise, and Inside Philanthropy. An avid writer and researcher, more of Asante-Muhammad's work can be found in Medium, HuffPost, and the Racial Wealth Divide Initiative's blog.



Steve Hawkins

Vice President, Research and Programs

Expert in: Civil and human rights, policy reform, and philanthropy

Steve Hawkins is the vice president of Research and Programs at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Hawkins brings 30 years of experience as a senior executive leader in the areas of civil and human rights, policy reform, and philanthropy. He has held numerous positions over the course of his career, including as Executive Director for Amnesty International USA, Executive Vice President for the NAACP, and Program Executive at Atlantic Philanthropies. At the NAACP, Hawkins oversaw programs in health, education, economics, and criminal justice. He also hired the first-ever program director for environmental justice and helped launch a job placement initiative for returning citizens in Fortune 500 companies.

Before joining the Center, Hawkins served as the managing director of the only litigation finance fund in the United States dedicated to supporting civil cases brought on behalf of underserved communities.

Hawkins holds a JD from NYU School of Law where he was a Root-Tilden Scholar and Junior Fellow at the Center for International Studies. He also holds a BA from Harvard College in Economics and was awarded the Michael Clark Rockefeller Fellowship upon graduation to study abroad in southern Africa. Among his many distinctions, Hawkins was honored as the 2017-18 Weisberg Chair in Human Rights at Beloit College.



Sophia Kerby

Vice President,Government Affairs

Expert in: Legislative advocacy, philanthropy, and government

Sophia Kerby is the vice president of Government Affairs at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, where she leads the organization's legislative and advocacy efforts. Sophia brings over 14 years of experience in legislative advocacy, philanthropy, and government. Prior to joining the Joint Center, Sophia served as a Senior Advisor to the Women's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Labor under the Biden-Harris Administration, where she played a pivotal role in supporting women's economic empowerment through the implementation of the Investing in America agenda. As Principal of Policy and Advocacy at Omidyar Network, a global philanthropy, she directed federal and state government affairs work at the intersection of technology, the economy, and belonging.

Sophia's extensive experience also encompasses state and local policy advocacy in reproductive and sexual health, as well as research and analysis on the intersection of race, democracy, and the economy. Recognized as a strategic thinker and collaborative leader, she excels at building partnerships and driving consensus to advance equity. Sophia has trained hundreds of elected officials and advocates on storytelling, organizing, and policy advocacy.

Sophia holds an MBA from Georgetown University with a focus on social impact and sustainable business and a BA from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Dr. LaShonda Brenson

Senior Researcher

Expert in: Hill diversity, data analysis, and qualitative research

LaShonda Brenson, Ph.D., is the senior researcher. Prior to her current role, she served as the Senior Fellow of diversity and inclusion at the Joint Center.

Prior to her current role, she served as a Civil Rights Analyst at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. At the Commission, LaShonda organized national briefings and wrote reports on municipal fines and fees and its impact on minority communities, minority voting rights, and women in prison. Previously, she was the Research Director at Project Vote, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded on the belief that an organized, diverse electorate is the key to a better America.

LaShonda earned her bachelor's degree in Mathematics and Political Science from the University of Rochester, and her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Using qualitative interviews with congressional staffers and quantitative methods, her dissertation research provides evidence that the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), as institutions, matter. One way she demonstrates the added value of the CBC and CHC is by illustrating that when caucus members serve as caucus leaders, they introduce more bills because of their additional staff capacity.

LaShonda's work has been featured in Essence, The Grio, Roll Call, Politico, ABC News, CNN.com, and The New York Times, among others. Dr. Brenson has appeared on MSNBC and has contributed to The Hill and The Washington Informer.

LaShonda's most recent publications include "Racial Diversity Among U.S. Senate State Directors" and "Recent U.S. House Compensation and Diversity Survey Shows African Americans and Latina/os are Underrepresented Among Senior Roles." For more publications, click here.



Danielle (Davis) Canty, Esq.

Senior Advisor and Director, Technology Policy

Expert in: Broadband adoption and access, content moderation, and privacy

Danielle A. (Davis) Canty, Esq., is the senior advisor and director of Technology Policy at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, where she leads the organization's Technology Policy program. Her primary areas of focus encompass broadband adoption and access, content moderation, and privacy issues. She brings a wealth of experience to her role as a highly accomplished attorney specializing in technology and telecommunications law, policy development, and civil rights advocacy.

Before assuming her current position, Canty held the role of assistant general counsel at the Universal Service Administrative Company. In this capacity, she provided legal counsel related to the administration of the Affordable Connectivity Program and the USF Lifeline Program. Additionally, she served as a Tech and Telecom Policy counsel at the Multicultural Media, Telecom, and Internet Council. Here, she offered guidance on tech and telecom matters to leadership, managed the fellowship program, reviewed outgoing communications, and drafted and edited comments submitted to the FCC and NTIA.

Canty's dedication to advancing technology and telecom policy is evident in her prior work as a Tech and Telecom Policy fellow at the National Urban League Washington Bureau. In this role, she advised senior management on tech and telecom issues, collaborated on cross-functional teams and projects, and was responsible for drafting U.S. congressional testimony, policy recommendations, comments, letters, and digital outreach materials.

Canty's impressive academic background includes a Juris Doctor degree from Barry University, Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law, as well as a Bachelor of Science in General Economics and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Florida Atlantic University, where she graduated cum laude. She is an active member of the Florida Bar, the Federal Communications Bar Association (FCBA), and the International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP). Canty also serves as a co-chair on the FCBA's Privacy and Data Security Committee.



Cantrell Dumas

Senior Researcher,Financial Regulation and Policy

Expert in: Financial regulation, derivatives markets, fintech, and digital assets

Cantrell Dumas is senior researcher for Financial Regulation and Policy at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. His work focuses on retirement security and intergenerational economic stability among older Black Americans.

Prior to joining the Joint Center, Dumas served as Director of Derivatives Policy at Better Markets, where he led the organization's work on derivatives and commodities policy, with a particular focus on the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. His work spanned the full policymaking process and included participation in regulatory rulemakings, development of policy recommendations, authorship of original research and advocacy materials, and direct engagement with regulators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders on issues related to derivatives markets, market structure, and financial stability.

Before Better Markets, Mr. Dumas spent nearly a decade at the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission, where he helped develop and implement rules governing the derivatives markets. He also served at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation during the financial crisis, advising senior leadership on failed-bank resolutions and working with other financial regulators to preserve market confidence and protect consumers.

Mr. Dumas holds a law degree from Columbia Law School and a bachelor's degree in finance from the University of South Alabama.



Dr. LaToya Parker

Senior Researcher

Expert in: Economic and tax policy, racial wealth inequality, federal appropriations, Black economic justice, and higher education funding equity

LaToya B. Parker, Ph.D. is the Senior Researcher in the Office of the President at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, where she leads the organization's Economic Policy and Tax Policy programs. Working closely with Joint Center President Dedrick Asante-Muhammad, she develops strategy and programming to address wealth inequality and advance Black economic justice.

Since joining the Joint Center, Dr. Parker has relaunched the tax policy program, established a national Tax Advisory Committee, and led the inaugural Wealth Agenda Convening—a high-profile national event focused on tax reform, economic inclusivity, and equitable access to the green economy. She leads the Joint Center's engagement in national coalitions advancing fiscal justice and racial equity and collaborates with policy stakeholders to shape priorities for Black economic policy. She also provides strategic leadership on philanthropic partnerships with major national funders that support the Joint Center's economic and tax policy work.

Before joining the Joint Center, Dr. Parker served as Research Study Manager at Westat, where she oversaw multimillion-dollar federal projects, conducted policy analyses through an equity lens, and led federal rulemaking and regulatory writing processes. At Decision Information Resources, she contributed to impact evaluations of national equity initiatives, including Bloomberg Philanthropies' Greenwood Initiative, which led to a $600 million investment in equity in medical education.

As a policy consultant with The Century Foundation, she analyzed federal appropriations tied to the Farm Bill, helping to uncover a $12 billion funding disparity between HBCU and non-HBCU land-grant institutions. Her research contributed to national policy attention and informed reform efforts to address historic underfunding.

Dr. Parker holds a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies from Howard University, where her dissertation, Congressional Access: Examining the Federal Lobbying of HBCU Doctoral Universities, explored the advocacy strategies of HBCU doctoral institutions using a mixed-methods approach grounded in Interest Convergence Theory and Critical Realism. She also holds a Master of Social Work in Community Administration and Policy from Howard University and a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from Eastern Michigan University.

Dedicated to dismantling systemic barriers to racial and economic equity, Dr. Parker bridges research, policy, and advocacy to drive meaningful, lasting change for Black communities.

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Dr. Gabrielle Smith Finnie

Senior Policy Analyst, Workforce Policy

Expert in: Higher education, economic mobility

Gabrielle Smith Finnie, Ph.D. is the senior policy analyst of Workforce Policy at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Prior to joining the Joint Center, she was a research intern at the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and graduate assistant in the higher education PhD program at Old Dominion University. In both roles, Dr. Smith Finnie has worked to reimagine higher education and advocate for evidence-based and equity-driven practices to ensure student success in higher education and economic mobility post degree attainment.

Dr. Smith Finnie holds a master's degree in higher education administration from Florida International University and a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Delaware. She also recently defended her Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) dissertation study which explored the impact and intersection of race and justice-involvement, examined Black individuals' ideologies of freedom, and their experiences in higher education and navigating society post-justice-involvement.

Outside of her scholastic and professional pursuits, Dr. Smith Finnie is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She is also an avid vinyl collector and is always looking for the best albums to add to her collection.

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