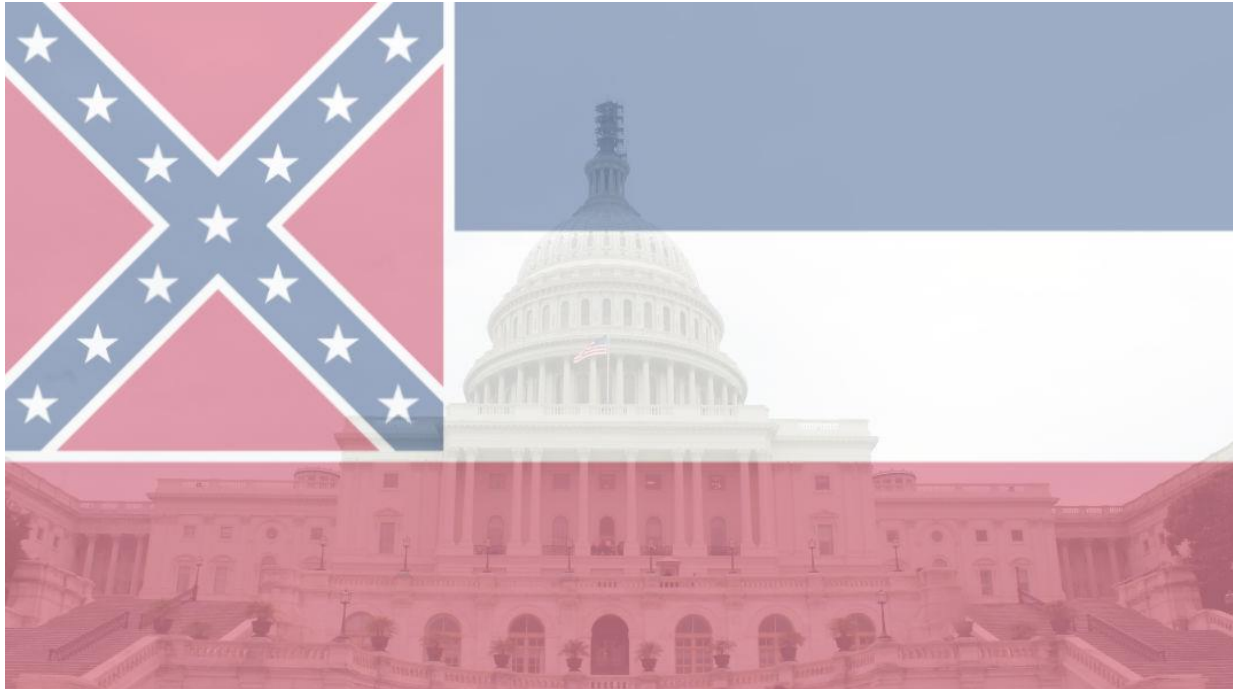




**JOINT CENTER**  
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**RACIAL DIVERSITY AMONG TOP STAFF OF THE  
MISSISSIPPI CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION**

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November 2018

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# Executive Summary

This report examines the racial diversity among the 16 top staffers of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Mississippi. This report defines top staff (or “key” or “senior” staff) to include: chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors in Washington, D.C. personal offices; and staff directors assigned to full committees. The data reflect employment on June 1, 2018. Key findings show:

- People of color account for 42.5 percent of Mississippi’s population, but they account for only 18.75 percent of the top staffers who work for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Mississippi.
- African Americans make up over 37 percent of Mississippi’s population but less than 13 percent of the top staffers who work for the Mississippi congressional delegation.
- Of the six top staffers who work for U.S. Senators from Mississippi, none are African American.
- Most African Americans in Mississippi (57.4 percent) live in a district represented by a U.S. House Member and two U.S. Senators without any Black top staffers. All White Mississippians are represented by a congressional delegation with at least five White top staffers.
- African Americans accounted for 13 percent of the Republican Party’s voters in Mississippi in 2016, but they account for none of the 14 top staffers who work for the five Republican Members of the state’s congressional delegation.
- Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith has a Latino top staffer, and all of Congressman Bennie Thompson’s top staffers are African American. Although the other four Members of the Mississippi congressional delegation represent areas that are, on average, 36.6 percent people of color, none of those Members have any top staffers of color.
- Mid-level staff positions are important “feeder” positions for top staff positions. In the U.S. Senate offices that represent Mississippi, just over 11 percent of the mid-level staffers are African American.
- Of the total of 16 top staff, five are women. Women account for 40 percent of U.S. House top staff and less than 17 percent of U.S. Senate top staff in offices that represent Mississippi.

Note: After the date of employment selected for data gathering for this report (June 1, 2018), Congressman Bennie Thompson (D MS-2) hired a Black woman as his chief of staff. She is not reflected in this report’s analysis.

**Table 1: Top Staff Diversity in Washington D.C. Personal and Full Committee Offices of Mississippi U.S. House & Senate Members (in percentages and raw numbers)**

Race	Percentage of Mississippi Population	Percentage of Top U.S. House & Senate Staff	Number of Top U.S. House & Senate Staff
White	56.6	81.25	13
African American	37.1	12.5	2
Latina/o	2.9	6.25	1
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0.9	0	0
Native American	0.4	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	1.2	0	0
TOTAL	99.1	100	16

Note: 0.9 percent of Mississippi’s population is listed as “some other race alone” according to the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Note: Representative Trent Kelly (R MS-1) has two chiefs of staff. Both are counted in this report.

# Introduction

This study analyzes the racial diversity of top staff in Washington, D.C. who work for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Mississippi.

Hiring top staffers of color is not an act of charity. It is the right thing to do, and it results in better public policy. Diverse top staffers allow a Member to understand her or his constituents and effectively represent them in Congress. Economic and sociological studies demonstrate that diverse work teams lead to greater productivity, help organizations establish trust with their clients, and help organizations make more innovative decisions.<sup>1</sup> Diversity among top staff would also facilitate diversity in other sectors in Mississippi and elsewhere, because top staff positions are pathways to other high-ranking positions in government, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector.

Unfortunately, although African Americans account for over 37 percent of Mississippi's population,<sup>2</sup> they account for only 12.5 percent of the top staff who work for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members who represent Mississippi.

## The Positions Analyzed in This Report

Members in both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate each have a “personal office” in Washington, D.C. that helps them represent their state or district, and most Members have three top positions in their personal offices: chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director. In addition, Members serve on committees and oversee committee staff. Each full committee is led by a Chair who is a Member of the majority party, and most committees have a majority staff director who works under the Chair. The minority party's committee Members are led by a Ranking Member, who generally oversees a minority staff director.

Like the Joint Center's previous studies, this report focuses on full committee staff directors and the top three personal office positions: chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director. The structure of each office varies, but these positions are the most consistent throughout each office, and they provide a comprehensive assessment of top staff diversity.

Persons holding these positions are invested with hiring and firing powers and they are given immense latitude in legislative and policy development. Collectively, these top staff manage a federal budget of over \$4 trillion and provide oversight of hundreds of government agencies

with over 3 million civilian and military employees. Top staff often are the public face of the office, meeting with Members, staffers, lobbyists, constituents, the media, and advocacy organizations. Top staff in the U.S. Senate also manage the confirmation process for commissioners, judges, ambassadors, and other appointees.

While some Members deem their state directors and district directors as top staff, this report focuses on top staff diversity in Washington, D.C. offices. Top staff in Washington, D.C. are often less visible to constituents in Mississippi than state staff. In addition, top staff in Washington, D.C. often engage more directly with other congressional offices in negotiating federal legislation, appropriations, agency oversight, and the confirmation process. Recognizing that in some offices the state director is a “feeder” position to becoming chief of staff, this report analyzes the diversity of state directors along with U.S. Senate mid-level positions in Table 7 below.

Even though this report focuses on top staff in both chambers and contains a section on mid-level “feeder” positions in the U.S. Senate, (see “The Pipeline: Racial Diversity Among Mid-Level Senate Staff”), people of color are employed in other positions that make significant contributions to congressional offices. This report, however, highlights a crucial issue—that few people of color hold senior-level positions. While there may be influential individual staffers of color who are not calculated in the data because their title is not included in our analysis, this fact should not deflect from the larger insight that the top staff positions examined in this report do not reflect the racial diversity of Mississippi. This is a structural challenge for the entire Mississippi delegation and the institution of Congress as a whole, rather than a problem attributable to a single Member or a single political party.

## Methodology

The Census Bureau defines *race* as a person’s self-identification with one or more social groups. This report contains five racial categories: White, African American, Latina/o, Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI), and Native American. The terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably throughout the report. The report also includes a category for staffers who identify as biracial or multiracial to ensure that each individual is accurately represented.

To identify staff initially, the authors used LegiStorm, a database that contains the most comprehensive and accurate biographical and contact data for each Member and congressional staffer. Data reflect employment in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate on June 1, 2018.

To initially identify the race of each staffer, the authors used photographs from LegiStorm and visited social networking sites—such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter—listed for each staffer. The authors also reviewed Roll Call, constituent photographs, news clippings, and press releases. LegiStorm’s database includes the gender of each staffer.

Researchers emailed the data that the authors collected to staffers in each personal and committee office to provide an opportunity for the offices to correct any errors. The email listed all identified top staff of color by name and position in the office (or indicated that the data showed that the office had no top staff of color). The email asked the recipients to reply and correct any errors. Offices that did not respond were emailed at least two more times and given an opportunity to correct the data. Emails sent to the U.S. Senate also included data on mid-level “feeder” positions (defined below in the section entitled “The Pipeline: Racial Diversity Among Mid-Level Senate Staff”).

The authors provided additional opportunities to congressional staffers to correct the data. In the U.S. Senate, for example, a paper letter was hand-delivered to each office providing an opportunity to reply. Also, the Asian American/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, and Native American staff associations sent relevant parts of the data to their members who work as staffers in the Senate. For example, the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus sent data on Black top and mid-level staff to their members who work in the Senate and asked whether anyone was missing. In the U.S. House, the authors took additional steps, which are outlined in the Joint Center’s September 2018 report *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*.<sup>3</sup>

After this entire process, the researchers lacked racial information for 3 of the 34 top and mid-level staffers in Mississippi (about 9 percent). For the purposes of calculating racial diversity, this report classifies these 3 staffers as White.

Due to rounding, the total percentages presented throughout this document may not add up to 100 percent precisely.

# Personal & Full Committee Office Diversity

This section analyzes each of the top staffers who work for Mississippi congressional Members in Washington, D.C. personal offices (chief of staff, legislative director, and communications director) and full committees (staff director).

Two Members of the Mississippi congressional delegation have staff directors of full committees due to their leadership roles. Congressman Gregg Harper is Chair of the Committee on House Administration, and Congressman Bennie Thompson is Ranking Member of the House Homeland Security Committee.

Of the 16 staffers who serve as full committee staff directors and personal office chiefs of staff, legislative directors, and communications directors for the U.S. House and U.S. Senate Members representing Mississippi, three are people of color (18.75 percent). This is significantly less than the 42.5 percent of Mississippi’s population who identify as people of color.

**Table 2: Top Staff Diversity in Washington, D.C. Personal and Full Committee Offices of Mississippi U.S. House & Senate Members by Position (in raw numbers)**

Race	Chief of Staff	Legislative Director	Communications Director	Staff Director
White	6	3	3	1
African American	0	0	1	1
Latina/o	0	0	1	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
Native American	0	0	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	3	5	2



# House vs. Senate Top Staff Diversity

In both Mississippi and nationwide, Black top staff in the U.S. House make up about half of their percentage of the overall population, and Black top staff are largely absent in the U.S. Senate. In Mississippi, African Americans make up 37.1 percent of the population, 20 percent of the top U.S. House staff, and none of the top U.S. Senate staff. The Joint Center’s 2015 Senate and 2018 House reports found that nationwide, African Americans accounted for 12.3 percent of the population, 6.6 percent of top U.S. House staff, and 0.9 percent of top U.S. Senate staff.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 3: Racial Representation of Mississippi U.S. House Top Staff and Mississippi U.S. Senate Top Staff (in percentages)**

Race	Mississippi Population	Mississippi U.S. House Top Staff	Mississippi U.S. Senate Top Staff
White	56.6	80	83.3
African American	37.1	20	0
Latina/o	2.9	0	16.7
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0.9	0	0
Native American	0.4	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	1.2	0	0
TOTAL	99.1	100	100

Note: 0.9 percent of Mississippi's population is listed as “some other race alone” according to the 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Note: Trent Kelly (R MS-1) has two chiefs of staff. Both are counted in this report.

# Political Party Diversity

Of the 16 top staff in the Mississippi congressional delegation in June 2018, the two Democrats were both African American, and of the 14 Republicans none were African American. Thirteen of the Republican top staff were White, and one was Latino.

**Table 4: Racial Representation of U.S. House and U.S. Senate Top Staff Representing Mississippi by Political Party (in raw numbers)**

Race	Republican	Democratic
White	13	0
African American	0	2
Latina/o	1	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0	0
Native American	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0
TOTAL	14	2

African Americans made up 84 percent of the statewide total of Democratic Party turnout in Mississippi in 2016, 35 percent of the turnout of independent voters, and 13 percent of total Republican Party turnout.<sup>5</sup> Of Republican turnout in each of the four congressional districts, African Americans accounted for 28 percent (MS-2), 15 percent (MS-3), 10 percent (MS-1), and 9 percent (MS-4).

**Table 5: Racial Representation of Top U.S. House and U.S. Senate Staff Compared with Mississippi Party 2016 Turnout (in percentages)**

Race	% of Total Republican Party Turnout in Mississippi in 2016	% of Mississippi Republican U.S. House & Senate Top Staff	% of Total Democratic Party Turnout in Mississippi in 2016	% of Mississippi Democratic U.S. House & Senate Top Staff
White	86	92.9	15	0
African American	13	0	84	100
Latina/o	0	7.1	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
Native American	0	0	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	99	100	99	100

A significant percentage of Republican turnout in Mississippi is Black, and racial voting statistics should not be an excuse for Republican Members in Mississippi to disregard racial diversity or to believe it is impossible to find top staff of color. The Joint Center’s 2015 report found that Republican U.S. Senators nationwide had more Black top staff than Democratic U.S. Senators. In the U.S. House, White Republican Members have more chiefs of staff of color than do White Democrats, and Speaker Paul Ryan has a Black chief of staff of his leadership office.<sup>6</sup>

# Racial Diversity Among Top Staff

Table 6 details the racial demographics of the area represented by each Member of the Mississippi delegation and the top staff who work for each Member. Of the 313 U.S. House Members nationwide who have no top staff of color, three come from Mississippi. Notably, all three reside in districts that are diverse, with Rep. Gregg Harper (MS-3) coming from a district that is nearly 40 percent people of color.<sup>7</sup>

Most African Americans in Mississippi (57.4 percent) live in a district represented by a U.S. House Member and two U.S. Senators without any African American top staffers. Only 12.9 percent of White Mississippians live in a district represented by a U.S. House Member without any White top staffers, and all White Mississippians are represented by two U.S. Senators with five White top staffers.

**Table 6: Comparison of Top Staff to Population Represented by Member**

Member	District	% Non-White Residents	% Non-White Top Staff
Rep. Thompson-D	MS-2	69.7%	100%
Sen. Hyde-Smith-R	Statewide	42.5%	33%
Sen. Wicker-R	Statewide	42.5%	0%
Rep. Harper-R	MS-3	39.5%	0%
Rep. Kelly-R	MS-1	32.8%	0%
Rep. Palazzo-R	MS-4	31.4%	0%

# The Pipeline: Racial Diversity Among Mid-Level Senate Staff

The diversity of mid-level “feeder” staff positions provides one indicator to predict future diversity among top staff. An examination of current mid-level staff provides a rough snapshot of part of the pool of talent that is currently gaining the relevant experiences and developing the relationships needed for promotion to top staff in the future.

The data in Table 7 reflect the racial diversity of staff in significant mid-level administrative, policy, and communications positions who work for U.S. Senators Cindy Hyde-Smith and Roger Wicker. Senator Hyde-Smith took office earlier this year to fill the seat of former Senator Cochran. As a result, she is not the Chair of any full committees or subcommittees. Senator Wicker is the Chair of the Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet Subcommittee of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. In addition, he is the Chair of the Subcommittee on Seapower of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Although Senator Wicker is the Chair of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission), this is not a standing U.S. Senate committee and thus we did not include the one staffer listed on LegiStorm as part of our analysis.

Resource constraints limited the analysis of “feeder” positions to the two U.S. Senators, but future Joint Center research may include an analysis of feeder positions in the U.S. House.

For the purposes of Table 7, “mid-level” positions include:

- Staff in the Washington, D.C. personal offices with the following titles: deputy chief of staff, administrative director, deputy legislative director, legislative assistant or equivalent (e.g., counsel, senior counsel, general counsel, chief counsel, special counsel, policy advisor), deputy communications director, or press secretary.
- State directors, because this position serves as a “feeder” position to chief of staff in some offices.
- Subcommittee staff directors and full committee or subcommittee staff who work under Senator Wicker with the following titles: chief clerk, deputy chief clerk, deputy staff director, policy director, communications director, deputy communications director,

general counsel, deputy general counsel, senior policy advisor, policy advisor, budget director, or professional staff member.

**Table 7: The Pipeline: Racial Representation of Mississippi U.S. Senate Mid-Level Staff (in raw numbers and percentages)**

Race	Sen. Hyde-Smith Raw Number	Sen. Hyde-Smith Percentage	Sen. Wicker Raw Number	Sen. Wicker Percentage
White	5	62.5	9	90
African American	1	12.5	1	10
Latina/o	0	0	0	0
Asian American/Pacific Islander	2	25	0	0
Native American	0	0	0	0
Bi/Multiracial	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	8	100	10	100

# Gender Among Top Staff

Of the 16 top staffers who work for Members from Mississippi, five are women. Four of the women are White, and one is African American.

**Table 8: Gender Breakdown among Top Staff of Mississippi Congressional Delegation by Race (in percentages)**

Race	Women	Men
White	30.8	69.2
African American	50	50
Latina/o	0	100

**Table 9: Percentage of Top Staff of U.S. House and Senate Members from Mississippi Who Are Women (in percentages)**

Mississippi Members...	Women Top Staffers
U.S. House & Senate combined	31.3
U.S. House Only	40
U.S. Senate Only	16.7
Republicans	28.6
Democrats	50

# Recommendations

No single solution to the lack of racial diversity among top staff of Mississippi's congressional delegation is sufficient. Change requires a clear commitment, strategic implementation, and monitoring of progress by Members. Individual U.S. House and Senate Members can take several steps to improve and maintain diversity in their offices:

- **Develop a written office diversity plan**, just as an office develops its own budget. The plan should include recruitment and hiring goals, as well as strategies that will be employed to retain people of color once they are hired. Existing staff should be tasked with implementing the plan, and Members should monitor and evaluate the performance of individual staff members and the office as a whole.
- **Track and annually disclose staff office demographic data.** It is difficult to fix a problem that goes unmeasured. Congress requires this disclosure from many federal agencies, government contractors, and other work organizations. Members of Congress should measure this same data and disclose it to their constituents.<sup>8</sup>
- **Adopt a version of the National Football League's "Rooney Rule,"** which requires that an office interview at least one candidate of color for each vacant senior position.
- **Recruit diverse interns from Mississippi, and pay them.** Unpaid internships often limit internship opportunities to young people from affluent families, and that creates a pool of talent for entry-level positions that does not reflect the diversity of Mississippi. This entry-level pool eventually shapes the talent pool for mid-level and top staff positions. Members should also recruit interns and fellows from the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies (APAICS), the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (CBCF), INSIGHT America, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI), the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI), and the GW Native American Political Leadership Program (NAPLP).
- **Build a diverse pipeline of mid-level staff.** Ensure robust diversity among legislative assistants, counsel, press secretaries, and other mid-level positions. Provide regular feedback and opportunities for growth. A diverse mid-level staff increases the probability of diverse top staff in the future.
- **Consult with colleagues who have diverse staffs and with staff associations of color** for ideas on recruitment and retention. Many congressional staff associations of color



already have informal partnerships with offices and hiring managers in the U.S. House and Senate. Formalize these relationships and create an integrated database of candidates for staff positions.

- **Obtain unconscious bias training** for the Member, the chief of staff, and all managerial staff involved in recruitment, hiring, evaluation, and retention.

## About the Authors

**Karra W. McCray** is a recent Master's graduate of Howard University. She earned a Political Science degree with concentrations in Black Politics and American Government. Her research interests include the study of the use of crime as an electoral weapon among candidates and the study of voter disenfranchisement among Black voters. Karra has also worked as a Legislative Aide for the South Carolina House of Representatives. She received her undergraduate degree in Political Science and English from the University of South Carolina.

**Don Bell** is the Director of the Black Talent Initiative at the Joint Center. Prior to this position, Don worked as a legal fellow to Senator Chris Murphy, judiciary staffer to Senator Richard Blumenthal, and associate counsel and then counsel to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Don also served as President of the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus (SBLSC). During his term, he conducted a groundbreaking census of Black Senate staffers that inspired a movement toward greater diversity and inclusion in policy making on Capitol Hill. Don received his B.A. and law degree from the University of Connecticut.

**Spencer Overton** is the President of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Spencer is also a tenured Professor of Law at George Washington University, and he has written a book and several other publications on race and equity. Spencer led several projects on the 2008 Obama presidential campaign and transition team, and during the Administration he served as Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General of Legal Policy at the Department of Justice. He clerked for U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Damon J. Keith of the Sixth Court, and graduated with honors from both Hampton University and Harvard Law School. I. D. Shadd, the brother of Spencer's great-great-great grandmother, served as Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives from 1874-1876.

# Acknowledgments

We are especially appreciative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for its support of this report. We also thank the Hewlett Foundation and the Democracy Fund for their support of the Joint Center's other activities designed to increase diversity among congressional staff.

We also appreciate the Congressional Asian Pacific American Staff Association, the Congressional Black Associates, the Congressional Hispanic Staff Association, the Congressional Native Staff Association, and the Senate Black Legislative Staff Caucus for providing input on this report's methodology, assistance in identifying staff members, and recommendations for presenting the data. We thank all offices that responded to our emails and phone calls to help us get accurate data. We are appreciative of each person who will use this report to improve the diversity in their office and in Congress as a whole.

We thank Dr. Elsie Scott, who led our efforts in publishing the September 2018 report *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Special thanks go to Attia Little, Harin Contractor, Victoria Johnson, Fane Wolfer, and P.J. Stinson, who worked tremendously hard to ensure we created a strong product.

Finally, we thank BlueLabs for providing data regarding the extent of support that political parties receive in Mississippi by race, and SKDKnickerbocker for stellar communications guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> Page, Scott E. 2008. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Levine, Sheen S., Evan P. Apfelbaum, Mark Bernard, Valerie L. Bartelt, Edward J. Zajac, and David Stark. 2014. "Ethnic Diversity Deflates Price Bubbles." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 111(52):18524-29.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. n.d. "ACS 2012-2016 Five Year Estimates" [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_5YR\\_DP05&rc=pt](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_DP05&rc=pt)

<sup>3</sup> Scott, Elsie L., Karra W. McCray, Donald Bell, and Spencer Overton. 2018. *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (see methodology on pages 7-10). The Mississippi U.S. House top staff data in this report comes from the Joint Center's *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff* report, and the Joint Center subsequently researched the Mississippi U.S. Senate top and mid-level staff using a similar methodology tailored to the unique characteristics of the U.S. Senate.

<sup>4</sup> Scott, Elsie L., Karra W. McCray, Donald Bell, and Spencer Overton. 2018. *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; Jones, James R. 2015. *Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

<sup>5</sup> Percentage of party turnout data in Mississippi was provided by [BlueLabs](#), an analytics and technology company.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, Elsie L., Karra W. McCray, Donald Bell, and Spencer Overton. 2018. *Diversity Among Top U.S. House Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; Jones, James R. 2015. *Diversity Among Top Senate Staff*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey Estimates for 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. <https://www.census.gov/mycd/>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. "EEO Reports / Surveys." <http://www.eeoc.gov/employers/reporting.cfm>

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