MEET OUR EXPERTS
Spencer Overton is the President of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, which was founded in 1970 and is America’s Black think tank. Spencer became the leader of the Joint Center in 2014, restructured the organization, and helped ensure its financial health. Today, the Joint Center produces data, research, and analysis on economic and tech policy issues that are essential to the future of Black communities, including supporting small business, the future of Black workers, expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, stopping online disinformation, and broadband access and adoption.

Spencer is the author or co-author of a book and several academic articles, think tank reports, and popular commentaries on race and public policy, including “An Introduction to the Future of Work in the Black Rural South,” “Improving Training Evaluation Data to Brighten the Future of Black Workers,” “State Power to Regulate Social Media Companies to Prevent Voter Suppression,” “Policies to Help Black & Latino Businesses Use Mobile Apps to Grow,” and “5G, Smart Cities & Communities of Color.”

During the Obama administration Spencer served as Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Office of Legal Policy (the “think tank” of the Department of Justice) and as a member of the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans. Spencer has also served on the boards of Dēmos, the American Constitution Society, and Common Cause. His work on national election commissions resulted in Iowa restoring voting rights to over 80,000 returning citizens and the prominent positioning of South Carolina in the modern Democratic presidential primary process, which would later have significant implications in selecting the Democratic nominee in 2008 (Barack Obama) and 2020 (Joseph Biden).

Since 2005, Spencer has been a tenured Professor of Law at George Washington University, and is currently on leave from GW. Prior to GW, he represented major companies while practicing law at the firm Debevoise & Plimpton, clerked for U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Damon J. Keith, and graduated with honors from both Hampton University and Harvard Law School.

Spencer has provided analysis for FiveThirtyEight, NPR, The Guardian, The Washington Post, and The Atlantic among others. He has also appeared on MSNBC and has contributed to The Hill, The Washington Post, and Slate.
Jessica Fulton is the Vice President of Policy. An expert on issues at the intersection of race and economic policy, Jessica’s work focuses on identifying and promoting policies to advance the socioeconomic status of the Black community. In her current role, she oversees the Joint Center’s research and policy team and leads the economic policy program.

Before joining the Joint Center, she served as External Relations Director at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, where she worked with scholars to advance policymaker understanding of the connection between economic inequality and economic growth. She has also held local research and advocacy positions at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute and the Chicago Urban League.

Jessica serves on the Board of The Black Swan Academy, an organization focused on increasing civic engagement among Black youth, and the Advisory Board of the Sadie Collective, which strives to increase the representation of Black women in economics. Jessica earned a bachelor’s degree in Economics from the University of Chicago and a master’s degree in Economic Policy Analysis from the Kellstadt Graduate School of Business at Depaul University. Jessica is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Jessica is a frequent guest on NPR and has appeared on MSNBC and The Hill. Her work has also been featured in The New York Times and TIME Magazine.

Jessica’s most recent publications include “Exploring Challenges for Small-Business Owners Across Race” and “Improving the Earned Income Tax Credit for Black Workers Without Children.” For more publications, click here.
Dr. LaShonda Brenson 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 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.
Dr. Alex Camardelle is the Director of the Workforce Policy Program, which centers Black workers in policy debates concerning the future of work, workforce development, and access to good jobs.

Prior to joining the Joint Center, Alex served as the Senior Policy Analyst for Economic Mobility at the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute where his research and advocacy supported policy reforms shaping workforce development, worker justice, and access to core safety net programs for individuals and families with low incomes. He also worked at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, where he was responsible for strengthening economic opportunity through research, grantmaking, and partnerships.

Dr. Camardelle serves on the board of directors for the National Skills Coalition, an organization that advocates to remove barriers to high-quality training and employment services through policy change. He also serves on the board of directors for Foreverfamily, Inc., a national nonprofit dedicated to supporting youth with incarcerated parents. He is also part of Georgia State University’s 40 under 40 alumni class.

Alex holds a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Alabama. He is also a graduate of Georgia State University, where he earned his Master’s of Public Administration degree in policy analysis and evaluation and Doctor of Philosophy degree in educational policy studies. Alex’s scholarship focuses on race, workforce development, and political economy. He is also a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated.

Alex has contributed to The Hill and his work has been featured in The New York Times, Bloomberg, Washington Post, and NPR Marketplace. He has also appeared on the Black News Channel.

Alex’s most recent publications include “Principles to Support Black Workers in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act” and “Biden Budget Would Make Key Workforce Investments For Black Communities.”
Brian Kennedy II is a Senior Policy Analyst for the Workforce Policy Program.

Prior to joining the Joint Center, Brian served as a Policy Advisor in the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Recovery Programs where he supported the administration of American Rescue Plan funds to states and local governments. Previously, Brian worked as a consultant with Frontline Solutions, a Black-owned and led consulting firm supporting non-profits and philanthropic organizations. Brian has also worked as a Senior Policy Analyst with the North Carolina Budget and Tax Center, focusing on living wages and social safety net programs.

Brian earned bachelor’s degrees in History and Political Science from North Carolina Central University and a master’s degree in Public Policy from the Heller School at Brandeis University. Brian is also the co-host of “At The Intersection,” a Durham-based podcast about policy, culture, and identity.
Justin Nalley is a Senior Policy Analyst for the Workforce Policy Program.

Justin brings his experience advocating for access to equitable resources for Black communities to produce timely policy research and data analysis, which centers Black workers in workforce development, post-secondary access, and access to quality jobs.

Before joining the Joint Center, Justin served as the Senior Public Policy Analyst for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland. In this role, Justin researched, lobbied, and conducted state fiscal analysis to shape policy for Black youth and families in public education, juvenile justice reform, and voting rights. Justin was also instrumental in the formation and recognition of the first union at the ACLU of Maryland and held the role of shop steward, leading contract negotiations. He also worked at Baltimore City Public Schools as an analyst, ensuring the large urban district received accurate state revenue to support their students.

Justin is a member of the National Forum for Black Public Administrators and the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management. Justin attended the University of Maryland Eastern Shore before earning his Bachelor of Business Administration from Temple University and Master of Public Administration from West Chester University.
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