

MEET
OUR
EXPERTS





Jessica Fulton

Interim President & Vice President, Policy

Expert in: Intersection of race and economic policy, economic inequality, and small businesses

Jessica Fulton is the Interim President and 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

Senior Researcher

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

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 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](#).



Dr. Kayla Elliott

Director, Workforce Policy

Expert in: Postsecondary finance and accountability, postsecondary access and completion, HBCU finance, and the intersection of race and higher education

Kayla C. Elliott, Ph.D. is director of Workforce Policy at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, America's Black think tank. She leads a team of experts who center Black communities in policy debates concerning the future of work, workforce development, and access to good jobs. Prior to the Joint Center, Kayla was the director for higher education policy at The Education Trust. She has shared her expertise on outlets such as The Washington Post, TheGrio, and The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Kayla also holds a master's in philanthropy and a certificate in nonprofit management and has worked on P-20 education issues with a range of nonprofit organizations, including Lumina Foundation, the Southern Education Foundation, and Teach For America. Kayla earned a Ph.D. in higher education leadership from Florida Atlantic University, where she taught undergraduate courses and worked in research roles in the College of Education and the Provost's Office.

A proud HBCU advocate and third-generation alumna, Kayla earned studied business administration at Fisk University. Kayla is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. She enjoys cooking, reading, and exploring parks, festivals, and restaurants in the Washington, D.C. area.



Brian Kennedy II

Senior Policy Analyst, Workforce Policy

Expert in: Living wages, public debt,
and jobs numbers

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

Senior Policy Analyst, Workforce Policy

Expert in: Workforce development, access to equitable resources and quality jobs, and jobs numbers

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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