



ABNYTalks

Unemployment, Underemployment and Gainful Employment (Speaker Bios)

Jennifer Jones Austin

A fourth-generation leader of faith and social justice, Jennifer Jones Austin fights for equity. As CEO of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), an anti-poverty, policy and advocacy organization with 170 member agencies and faith partners, she has led and secured monumental changes in social policy to strengthen and empower the disenfranchised and marginalized. Jennifer brings to her work a profound understanding of the link between race, poverty, law and social policy in America, and the role religion plays.

Prior to joining FPWA, Ms. Jones Austin served as Senior Vice President of the United Way of New York City; the City of New York's first Family Services Coordinator; Deputy Commissioner for the NYC Administration for Children's Services; Civil Rights Deputy Bureau Chief for Attorney General Eliot Spitzer; and Vice President for LearnNow/Edison Schools, Inc.

Ms. Jones Austin chairs the NYC Racial Justice Commission, the first of its kind in the nation created to develop ballot proposals to revise the City's charter to dismantle structural racism in government functions and ensure equity for Black, indigenous and other persons of color. She has chaired several other influential boards and commissions, including the Mayoral Transition for Bill de Blasio; the NYC Procurement Policy Board; the NYC Board of Correction, where she presided over the promulgation of rules to end solitary confinement; the NYS Supermarket Commission; and the Community Engagement for Brooklyn District Attorney Gonzalez's Justice 2020 Initiative. She was a lead advisor for the NYPD Reform and Reinvention Collaborative, and a member of the statewide COVID-19 "Roll Up Your Sleeves" Task Force created to ensure vaccine information and equitable access in Black and Brown communities. She currently serves as Vice Chair of the Board of National Action Network; member of the Feerick Center for Social Justice Advisory Board; and member of the Center for Law, Brain and Behavior Advisory Board at Harvard University. She also is the scholar in residence at Nyack College and Alliance Theological Seminary Center for Racial Reconciliation (CRR).



Jennifer co-hosts WBLS' "Open Line", guest hosts weekly the nationally syndicated radio program, "Keep'n It Real with Rev. Al Sharpton", and appears frequently on the cable show, "Brooklyn Savvy". She is a returning guest and contributor on the "Karen Hunter Show".

Jennifer Jones Austin is the author of *Consider It Pure Joy*. Described as "a story that if not lived would make for a great novel", it is the harrowing account of her year-long battle with a sudden, life-threatening illness, and the power of faith and community to transform desperation into joy. She is the editor of *God in The Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited*, the re-release of her father, William Augustus Jones Jr.'s seminal work deconstructing the "System" of racism, capitalism and militarism all working in concert to continually oppress people of color.

Jennifer is a graduate of the Fordham University School of Law, the New York University Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, and Rutgers University. A recipient of numerous awards and recognitions, including two honorary doctorates, she considers the four honors bestowed upon her by her three alma maters especially significant. Jennifer has two children and resides in Brooklyn, New York with her husband.

Valerie White

As Senior Executive Director of LISC NY, Valerie is responsible for leading the expansion strategy to promote LISC's statewide efforts to create an economic and community development ecosystem that addresses deep rooted systemic inequities. Through the usage of capital investment, policy and legislative advocacy, and programmatic initiative design and delivery, she elevates LISC's role as a key voice among legislative, government, private sector, philanthropic, and nonprofit/community partner stakeholders across New York. Valerie also oversees the LISC NYC and LISC WNY local offices.

Valerie has more than 30 years of experience across private, public, and non-profit sectors. Before joining LISC NYC in April 2020, Valerie was Executive Vice President at Empire State Development (ESD), as well as Executive Director of the New York State Division of Minority and Women's Business Development. Previously, she was Vice President at the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation and managing director at Standard & Poor's Global Ratings (S&P). In addition to her extensive professional experience, Valerie also serves as an advisory board member for the Fordham Urban Law Center and a director of the Fordham Law Alumni Association.



Valerie holds both a Bachelor's degree in Communications and a J.D. from Fordham University, as well as a Master's degree in Management and a Certificate in Organization Development from The New School.

Lauren Melodia

Lauren brings over 15 years of experience in policy advocacy, economic research, organizing, and coalition-building to her role at the Center. Prior to joining the Center, she worked at the Roosevelt Institute, providing research and data analysis on the Covid-19 economic recovery, inflation, and fiscal and monetary policy at the national level. Lauren is a fellow at the Groundwork Collaborative and has presented her work to the US Joint Economic Committee, the House Financial Services Committee, and the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Her writings on the state of the economy have been published in the Washington Post, The Nation, and Ms. Magazine. She has also organized criminal justice campaigns in New York State, including a successful end to New York's exploitative prison telephone contract, and has designed and promoted regional economic development infrastructure projects to create and maintain jobs in rural areas. Lauren holds a BS in foreign service from Georgetown University and an MA in economics from CUNY John Jay College. She grew up in Seattle, WA, where her first job was helping her mother run a family child care center in their home.

Marjorie Parker

Marjorie serves as the President and CEO of JobsFirstNYC. Marjorie has more than 25 years of experience overseeing adult and youth services initiatives and consulting for nonprofit organizations. Marjorie served as Deputy Executive Director before assuming leadership of JobsFirstNYC in 2017. Prior to joining JobsFirstNYC, she was the Deputy Executive Director of programs at Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow. Marjorie has also held positions at the CUNY Research Foundation and New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. She serves as the current Board Chair of Reconnect NYC. Marjorie holds a bachelor's degree from Fordham University, a master's in public administration from New York University, a Certificate in Executive Education from the Senior Leaders Program at Columbia Business School, and a Certificate in Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management from Harvard Business School. Marjorie was named one of Robin Hood's 2022 Power Fund Leaders and has recently been honored as a Crain's New York Business 2023 Notable Black Leader.