

# CULTURAL ICONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE



The Iconic Impact Initiative by Bridge Philanthropic Consulting, LLC



# NBA All-Stars of Philanthropy



By Tashion Macon, Ph.D, Jennifer Jiles, and Dwayne Ashley

# Introduction



When Kobe Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter Gianna died with seven others in a helicopter crash in January 2020, it left a tragic void not only in the hearts of his family and the NBA but in the world of philanthropy.

It spoke volumes that they were on their way to a girls' basketball game at the Mamba Sports Academy, where Kobe's daughter played and where he gave his time overseeing the facilities and coaching. Although Bryant spent 20 years in the NBA as a transcendent talent with the Los Angeles Lakers, he also left a legacy of giving.

In 2017 he launched the Mamba League, in collaboration with Nike and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Los Angeles, to reach underprivileged communities. Since entering the public eye, Bryant had also granted more than 250 wishes of children battling life-threatening illnesses through the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and in 2009 donated \$700,000 to relief efforts after a devastating earthquake in China.

The millions of dollars and countless hours given by Bryant, as well as those who entered the NBA before him like Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson, illustrated how they were not only perennial on-the-court superstars but Hall of Fame philanthropists. However, a new perspective on players' contributions like those of Bryant, Jordan, and Johnson emerged soon after Kobe's death.

The year 2020 revealed Blacks needed their leaders to up their game beyond just generosity—they needed to fight for social justice fearlessly and publicly. The demand became clear as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor died at the hands of police, triggering nationwide racial justice protests, while COVID-19 was killing nearly three times as many Blacks as whites, with Blacks at greater risk because so many work at low-income, frontline jobs.

Fortunately, the new generation of NBA stars has been up to the challenge. We proudly recognize the NBA All-Stars of Philanthropy as part of our Iconic Impact Initiative series. This series installment is our way of spreading awareness during the league's All-Star Game celebration that African Americans' contributions should be known to Americans of every color, not just their own.

How effectively have these players stepped up? When conservative commentator Laura Ingraham told LeBron James to "Shut up and dribble," he not only refused to "shut up" but continued the fight in meaningful ways. James and business partner Maverick Carter's SpringHill Entertainment recently received a \$100 million investment to jumpstart a media empire, seeking to amplify the perspective of African Americans. Plans are in the works for a documentary about the massacre on "Black Wall Street"—the bloody 1921 Tulsa race massacre.

With LeBron blazing the new trail, Jordan and Magic showed they could step up to the challenge of the times, too. Jordan and his Jordan Brand pledged \$100 million over the next 10 years to combat racism and police brutality. A company by Magic is donating the same amount to fund federal loans to businesses after many African Americans and Latinos were left behind in the emergency COVID relief program.

Though staking his own territory, LeBron definitely learned from the best. In 2016, he shared a stage with Michael, Magic, and Kobe as they were among those recognized for donating millions apiece for the newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington. It was as if they were passing LeBron the philanthropic torch.

Upon hearing of Bryant's death in January 2020, James tweeted, "I promise you I'll continue your legacy man!" You can be sure that legacy wasn't just about bringing the Lakers another championship. It was also about meeting the philanthropic and social justice moment.

We have great hope that the legacy of giving by African Americans is sure to continue on mightily, directly rippling from LeBron's pledge to Kobe. The standard and the example have been set. The NBA All Stars of Philanthropy are undoubtedly a new breed of player born out of a world calling for change. They are equipped to lend their financial support as they have succeeded too at thoughtful financial planning while staying engaged in and educated on money and social matters. It is now at the intersection of it all that we witness the future of black empowerment through the lens of philanthropy.

**Drew Hawkins**

*Founder and CEO, Edyoucore Sports & Entertainment*

# NBA All-Stars of Philanthropy

The NBA responded with unprecedented fortitude and forthrightness when George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery were killed by police, sparking racial protests across the country. Last summer, as the league remained on hiatus amid the COVID-19 outbreak, the league announced a \$300 million commitment “dedicated to creating greater economic empowerment in the Black community.” The league and the Players Association also agreed to give the players a choice of 29 social justice messages they could wear on their uniforms during the abbreviated 2020-2021 season, including “Black Lives Matter,” “I Can’t Breathe,” and “Say Her Name.”

Their actions marked a new era in the world of philanthropy and racial justice—a collective movement by a league and its players that seemed unthinkable just four years earlier when the NFL’s Colin Kaepernick was ostracized and blackballed for kneeling during the national anthem to protest the country’s treatment of minorities.

But it’s probably a safe bet the NBA’s philanthropy would not have occurred if not for the longstanding leadership of its greatest active player, LeBron James. He, Dwyane Wade, and the entire Miami Heat team posed for a photo wearing black hoodies in 2012 to protest the killing of Trayvon Martin, and James has been vocal ever since. As Mike Wise wrote in the *Washington Post* last year, “a new era of athlete activism has begun.”

“Not since the late 1960s and 1970s—when tennis legend Arthur Ashe used his platform to fight South African apartheid, and Muhammad Ali refused to enter the military draft during the Vietnam War, citing his religious beliefs, and Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City—had prominent sports stars shown moral social conviction, putting themselves out there in a way that made sponsors and their organizations cringe,” Wise wrote.

James was relentless in his demands for social change, and equally forceful in his determination to use his wealth for the betterment of his community, giving millions for programs in his home city of Akron, Ohio, and for helping Blacks throughout the country.

It’s an ongoing pastime for fans to debate whether LeBron or Michael Jordan is basketball’s GOAT (Greatest of All Time) for their on-the-court accomplishments. But Jordan came up at a time when athletes steered clear of controversy and politics. Although his newfound commitment since George Floyd is unarguable—he recently announced he and Nike-owned Jordan Brand would donate \$100 million over 10 years to organizations supporting racial equality, social justice, and education initiatives for Black youth—James already had been making his voice heard despite heavy pushback for nearly a decade.

With the league marking its annual All-Star Game on March 7, Bridge Philanthropic Consultants is pleased to honor these NBA All-Stars of Philanthropy. In America, it is the White philanthropic leaders who gain the most attention, but the NBA’s current crop has shown what a group of talented, intelligent athletes can do in wielding philanthropy as a weapon for social justice.



Image from yahoo.com



# LeBron James

LeBron James was only a 19-year-old newcomer to the NBA when he showed he had the wisdom of a veteran when it came to giving back. He started up the LeBron James Family Foundation in 2004, and when Hurricane Katrina swamped New Orleans a year later, disproportionately wiped out African American neighborhoods, it donated \$185,000 toward relief, and he personally bought \$120,000 of goods from Sam's Club to be sent for immediate relief to those in need.

He then turned his attention to his hometown of Akron and to Cleveland, where his NBA career began. He granted funds to the National Urban League, YMCA, Boys Hope, and Girls Hope. After leaving Ohio for the Miami Heat, he launched the "I Promise" program in Akron schools, targeting at-risk students starting in third grade. He stepped to the fore monetarily in 2015-17 by donating a combined \$1.8 million to the Smithsonian Institution, and joined Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and Magic Johnson among the founding donors of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington.

"If [basketball] is his only legacy, it's extraordinary," said former Lakers great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. "But he's done a lot more than that, both on the court and off the court. ... He's an amazing individual."

James's legacy is far beyond empowering the Black community. In addition to the hoodies were the

"I Can't Breathe" T-shirts in 2014 after the killing of Eric Garner, who used those words during a chokehold. LeBron also joined with other sports and entertainment stars to launch "More Than a Vote," to get African Americans to fight voter suppression and get to the polls. He and Kevin Durant's vocality eventually put them in the crosshairs of then-President Donald Trump, with conservative commentator Laura Ingraham telling them to "shut up and dribble."

"I will not shut up and dribble," James said in 2018 during All-Star Weekend. "I mean too much to my family and all these other kids that look up to me for inspiration and try to find a way out."

Now the 36-year-old Los Angeles Laker is worth \$480 million and turning that extreme wealth toward even more social justice. He and business partner Maverick Carter have founded SpringHill Entertainment, with an eye toward productions that connect with the community.

One film will be "I Promise." In 2014, he launched the program as an enrichment program for third graders. He next pledged that any I Promise student graduating high school could attend the University of Akron for free. Now those students are gathered in one high school, and a documentary on them is following.

Image from NBC News



# Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan, the retired Chicago Bulls great and now majority owner of the Charlotte Hornets, continues to be a standard-bearer in retirement. He and his Jordan Brand have pledged \$100 million over the next 10 years to the cause of racial equality and ending police brutality and institutional racism.

The announcement from the Jordan Brand in June was powerful, demonstrating the sentiments of the African American community today and his commitment to bring his resources to the fight: "Black lives matter. This isn't a controversial statement. Until the ingrained racism that allows our country's institutions to fail is completely eradicated, we will remain committed to protecting and improving the lives of Black people.

He has made other extraordinary donations, with a list that stretches on and on. He has served as Make-A-Wish's Chief Wish Ambassador since 2008, granting hundreds of wishes over 30 years, donating and bringing in millions of dollars.

He also contributed \$2 million to relief efforts after Hurricane Florence struck the Carolinas in 2018, and made a multimillion dollar donation to Friends of the Children in support of the organization's national expansion campaign and their work in Charlotte and Chicago that same year. He also donated \$5 million and is a Founding Donor of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

Then there was his renowned Michael Jordan Celebrity Invitational golf tournament, which raised more than \$7 million from 2001-2014 for numerous international, national and local charitable organizations, including the American Red Cross International Response Fund, Ronald McDonald Houses of North Carolina, Opportunity Village.



Image from Empire Sports Media

# Kevin Durant

Kevin Durant of the Brooklyn Nets, like James, has been willing to speak out as well as use his wealth for the benefit of others. He founded the Durant Company, which focuses on tech, to provide him the resources for his philanthropy.

He has committed \$10 million and partnered with the Prince George's public schools in Maryland on a program called College Track. The 20-year-old venture helps disadvantaged children attend college and get a jump on life. It hosts entrepreneurial leadership, STEM education, and career readiness programs.

The Kevin Durant Charity Foundation has jumped to the fore in the fight against COVID-19. It is helping a long list of beneficiaries including the Food Bank of NYC, Coalition for the Homeless, GiveDirectly (\$1,000 direct payments to needy households), a program to donate PPE to healthcare workers, and the Capital Area Food Bank. That's in addition to his partnership with Degree to contribute \$1 million to support grassroots youth sports nationwide.

Image from USA Today

# Steph Curry

The famed Golden State Warrior and wife Ayesha moved into action last March when the coronavirus shut down schools. They teamed up with a food bank to provide more than 1 million meals to students in Oakland.

"We know the world is changing before our eyes in terms of dealing with the spread of coronavirus and we just found out that the Oakland Unified School District is closing the doors for the foreseeable future, so we want to intercede on behalf of the kids that rely on the daily services and try to help anyway we can," Curry said in the video.

Curry and his Warrior teammates also teamed up to donate \$1 million to a disaster relief fund for employees at their home arena, Chase Center, who wouldn't be able to work during the NBA shutdown.

Curry has been active since the early stages of his career. He partnered with the United Nations' "Nothing But Nets" campaign in 2012, a campaign to distribute mosquito nets to protect families from malaria throughout Africa. He went to Tanzania in person the following year to distribute nets to parents, children, and refugees. Curry also has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for college scholarships for military families.

Curry worked with "My Brothers Keeper," a program spearheaded by former President Barack Obama and focused on mentorship and financial support for Black youth.



# Harrison Barnes

The Sacramento Kings star was among five players receiving the 2019-20 NBA Cares Community Assist Award. We recognize Barnes and the others—Jaylen Brown, George Hill, Chris Paul, and Dwight Powell—here for their efforts. The award celebrated players for their work advancing social justice and providing COVID relief and support.

Barnes has stepped up to make his voice heard for racial justice. He paid the funeral costs for Atiatiana Jefferson, a 28-year-old woman shot by police at her home in Fort Worth, Texas. “We’ve heard the story too many times,” Barnes told Sports Illustrated about the cause of her death.

He went on to donate \$25,000 for every game he played in the NBA’s bubble to a different foundation, including the Atiatiana project, to help children find a path toward careers in the STEM fields.

“It’s just a matter of paying it forward to the next generation,” Barnes said. “We have a lot of issues going on and a lot of issues affecting our society, especially in the Black community. And so how do we leave this society in a better place than what it is now?”

Barnes has provided support to youth, families, and frontline workers in Sacramento, Dallas, and his hometown of Ames, Iowa. He and wife Brittany donated \$40,000 to deliver weekly groceries for families and senior citizens in Sacramento and contributed an additional \$40,000 to Hunger Busters, a local nonprofit providing daily meals for Dallas public school students. Barnes also donated nearly \$200,000 for refurbishments to his alma mater, Ames High School, to assist with safe and healthy learning.

Image from Getty Images

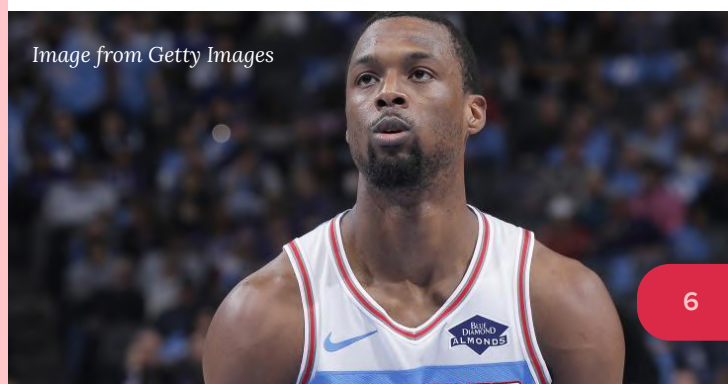


Image from pelicanandebrief.com

# Jrue Holiday

When the NBA temporarily shut down in March 2020, there was still a month’s worth of regular-season games left to play. Jrue Holiday, then of the New Orleans Pelicans, and his wife donated his remaining game checks to launch the Jrue and Lauren Holiday Social Justice Impact Fund. The funds, totaling \$5.3 million, were designed to aid communities in New Orleans, Indianapolis, and the Los Angeles area.

“God has blessed us with so much,” he told ESPN. “We know a couple of things that are important are time and money, and right now, we have both. To be able to give away our money to help further this movement and Black-owned businesses that have taken a hit in COVID-19, to us, it felt like the perfect time and opportunity.”

Most of the money was dedicated to nonprofits, Black-owned businesses, and citywide initiatives to increase equity for Black and brown communities. Jrue said they had wanted to join the racial justice protests, but with Lauren pregnant and the danger of COVID, this was a safe, smart way to invest in the community.

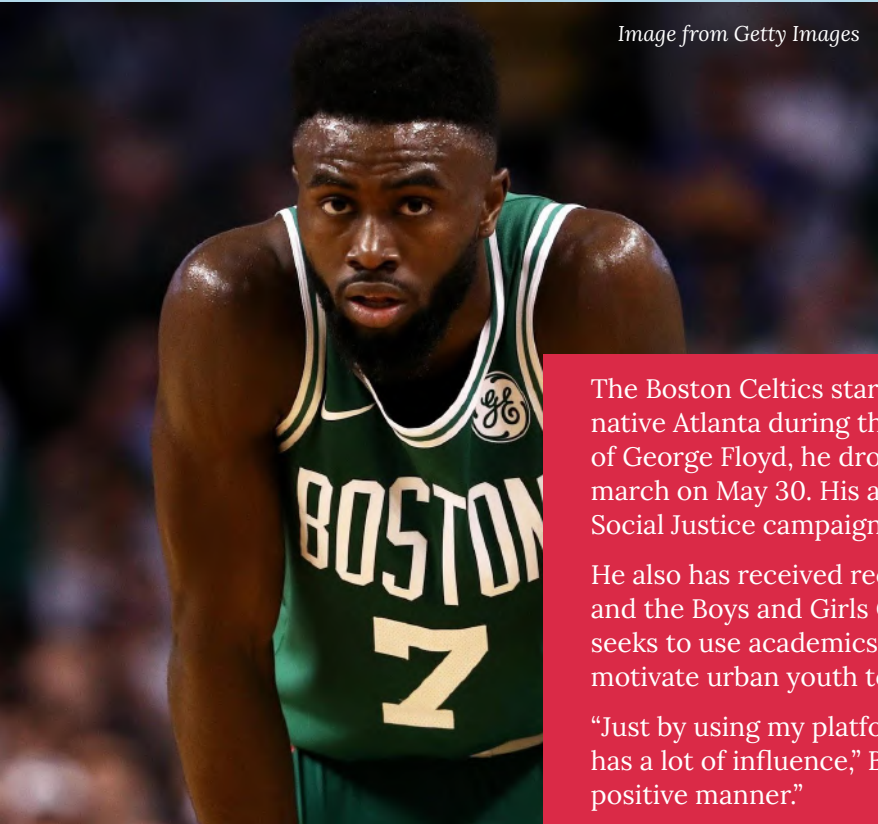


Image from Getty Images

# Jaylen Brown

The Boston Celtics star demonstrated leadership in Boston and his native Atlanta during the racial justice and COVID crises. After the killing of George Floyd, he drove 15 hours to Atlanta and organized a peaceful march on May 30. His advocacy inspired the Boston Celtics United for Social Justice campaign to address racial and social inequities.

He also has received recognition for his work with “No Books No Ball” and the Boys and Girls Club of Boston. The “No Books No Ball” program seeks to use academics, basketball, and community engagement to motivate urban youth to focus on school.

“Just by using my platform, being an athlete, a basketball player, I think has a lot of influence,” Brown told MassLive. “I’m just trying to use it in a positive manner.”

# Chris Paul

The Phoenix Sun launched the Chris Paul Family Foundation with the goal of leveling the playing field in education, sports, and life. Among his donation recipients was Winston-Salem State University, a Historically Black school located in his North Carolina hometown, to pay for scholarships and uniforms. He has given \$50,000 to date, with a \$250,000 target overall. He and his family also endow two scholarships to his alma mater, Wake Forest University.

As president of the Players Association, he was a key partner with the league in launching the initiative to place social justice messages on jerseys. He joined with Carmelo Anthony and Dwyane Wade to launch the Social Justice Fund in July to address social and economic justice issues facing Black communities.

Paul’s family foundation has partnerships with Feed the Children, Make-A-Wish, Salvation Army B&G Clubs, and other organizations to support education, literacy and technology enrichment, and health and wellness initiatives.



Image from CBS Sports



Image from Adobe Stock



## George Hill

The Milwaukee Bucks was at the vanguard of those who decided to boycott a playoff game in their team's faceoff with Orlando to raise awareness for the need for criminal justice reform. He and the team organized a call with the Wisconsin attorney general and lieutenant governor to discuss the issues. He also partnered with Represent Justice for a conversation with Xavier McElrath-Bey, who had previously been jailed, about the criminal justice system after the Bucks' Play for Justice game at Racine (Wisconsin) Correctional Institution.

In addition he started a youth mentorship program in Milwaukee called "George's Gentlemen," which is helping public school students in the city during the pandemic. He has donated meals to healthcare workers and contributed to the team's Emergency Relief Fund as well to provide financial relief to employees at the team's home arena, Fiserv Forum, who have been unable to work.

## Dwight Powell

The Dallas Mavericks was at the forefront during the early days of the pandemic organizing support for families and frontline workers in Dallas.

"The issues at hand regarding public health and equality are far reaching and demand all of our attention. So it goes without saying we as NBA players have felt the need to step up in whatever way we can to try and find ways to help keep people safe, fight for racial justice and urge everyone to register to vote so they too can use their voices," Powell said.

Powell's generosity is longstanding. When he lost his mother to breast cancer in 2012, he responded by creating the Dwight Powell Children and Family Support Fund in partnership with the University of Texas Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center to help patients and their children cope with the hardships of cancer.

Image from NBA

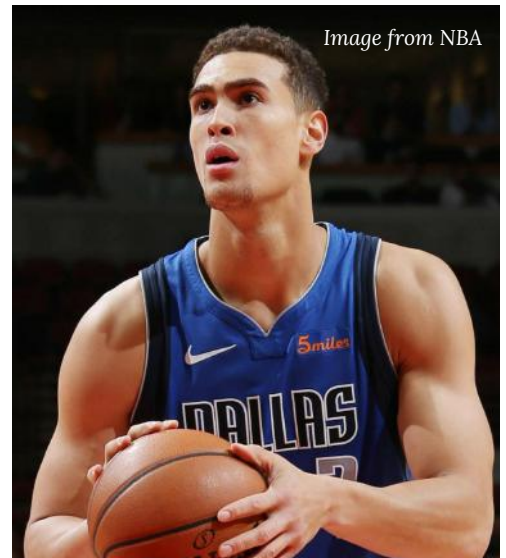


Image from USA Today

## Tobias Harris

When Tobias Harris of the Philadelphia 76ers realized how much people were in need because of COVID, he partnered with Habitat for Humanity of Philadelphia to help 12 families associated with the program to pay three months of their mortgage.

"We're experiencing one of the biggest crises in the history of humankind," he said. "Being able to provide kindness to people putting their lives at risk in hospitals and supporting Philadelphia families in dire need of help is an important responsibility for me."

The previous year, upon signing a contract to return to the team, he announced he was donating \$1 million to nine different charities, more than \$600,000 of which went to charities based in Philadelphia.

# THE AUTHORS

## **Tashion Macon, Ph.D** *Partner, Culturalist*

With almost twenty years of exceptional achievements in both the for-purpose and for-profit realms, Tashion Macon is widely known as a leading marcom and traditional/transmedia expert with an unwavering emphasis on results. A true visionary, Tashion sees changes and trends in the market before anyone else, frequently finding extraordinary and lucrative opportunities by innately recognizing what can be different and better. After she predicts the future, she gets in front of it. A gifted and highly respected culturalist and strategist, she regularly originates marketing and communications strategies that dramatically influence new consumer realms. She helms pace-setting marketing initiatives that generate

multi-million-dollar profits and successfully managed and navigated \$400MM media budgets to drive double digit percentage boosts in ROI. With a rare meteoric mind and transformational ability to galvanize like-minded people, she collaborates with corporate and client leaders to mobilize cross-functional teams. She is regularly sought out as a subject matter expert in pop culture, global social enterprise, philanthropy, politics/policies and impact programming and crafts important conversations that become part of the social lexicon.

Tashion holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology and a Master of Business Administration in Strategic Marketing. She has a number of professional affiliations and associations.

## **Jennifer Jiles** *Partner, Professor*

Jennifer Jiles is an award-winning strategic communicator, writer, magazine editor, producer, and college educator. She has held managerial or senior level positions across private industry, nonprofit organizations, higher education, and arts and entertainment. Her areas of expertise include strategic planning, campaigns, editorial, media, crises, and change management. Over the years, Jennifer has also built an appreciable track record in fundraising communications strategies. Most recently, she was a member of the Global

IT vice president's leadership team for Dell SecureWorks, a leading cyber intelligence company. Jennifer led the global corporate communication function for the company. She has worked with more than 25 organizations, including AT&T, UPS, Walmart, BET, and Jazz at Lincoln Center. Jennifer has been faculty at Georgia State University since 1999. She holds membership in the Technology Association of Georgia and the Public Relations Society of America.

## **Dwayne Ashley** *Founder and Chief Executive Officer*

Dwayne Ashley is renowned for his bold, strategic thinking and wise counsel in philanthropy. He is a successful entrepreneur. In the course of his career, he raised more than \$750 million. A fearless and authentic solicitor, he is committed to social justice and helping organizations of color maximize their fundraising success. He advises non-profit, philanthropists and influencers globally.

A powerhouse of energy and a passion for fundraising, Dwayne has managed capital and annual campaigns and spearheaded development for such notable organizations as the Jazz at Lincoln Center, Success for Kids, 100 Black Men of America, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, the United

Negro College Fund, and the United Way of Texas Gulf Coast, among many others.

Dwayne is a thought-leader in the field and he has shared valuable concepts in numerous articles and in four books. They include *Eight Steps to Raising Money: Measuring Your Fundraising Impact*, *Word for Word Publishing*; *8 Winning Steps to Creating a Successful Special Event* with Carol Campbell, Director of Events at Prairie View A&M University; *I'll Find A Way or Make One: A Tribute to HBCUs* with noted journalist Juan Williams and *Dream Internships: It's Not Who You Know, But What You Know!* He is an alumnus of Wiley College and the University of Pennsylvania Fels School of Government.



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