

Black History Month Feature

Amplifying Black Leaders in Finance

STRUCTURED
FINANCE
ASSOCIATION



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Aisha Greene is a former Leveraged Finance attorney and the Director of Attorney Development and Training at Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP. In her role, she oversees the Firm's Attorney Development, Training, Diversity, and Pro Bono/Corporate Social Responsibility Departments. Aisha works with the firm's management to develop and oversee firm professional development programming, including the formal assignment systems, partner and associate mentoring programs, upward and downward attorney performance evaluations, diversity programs, pro bono and corporate social responsibility initiatives, and all formal training and Continuing Legal Education programs.

In 2020, Aisha was elected to the Board of Directors for the Professional Development Consortium, a non-profit association of individuals who are responsible for developing and managing training and continuing professional development for lawyers, future lawyers and other professionals at law firms, law schools, government agencies and corporations. She is also a member of the Association of Law Firm Diversity Professionals.

Aisha also serves on the Board of Directors for the Rohan Levy Foundation, a non-profit organization that seeks to eradicate gun violence in Brooklyn, New York. She also serves on the Structured Finance Association's (SFA) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Steering Committee.

Aisha holds a B.A., magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa from New York University and a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Aisha lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and two daughters.

Can you tell us a bit about your firm's DEI initiatives?

Cadwalader has worked to achieve an inclusive work environment by being hyper-focused on the support and promotion of diverse talent and on ensuring that we have a culture of inclusion and belonging. Several years ago, we recognized a need to do better and made a real commitment to change and, I am proud to say, we have seen measurable progress. As an example, from 2009 through 2016, only 6% of internally promoted partners were diverse. Since 2016, 49% of internal partners promoted were diverse. This is in large part due to the creation of our Sponsorship Program in 2016 and other diversity career development and mentoring programs. We also create spaces of belonging through our support of the firm's affinity networks, cultural celebrations and, finally, our Civil Rights Series programs that provide conversation and education around timely and topical civil rights issues. We also focus our initiatives on an outward basis through our corporate responsibility efforts to increase justice and equal access for more citizens through our pro bono and community service efforts. Finally, our latest DEI initiative is our newly developed Supplier Diversity program. Not only does supplier diversity benefit underrepresented businesses, but it also uplifts the communities where those businesses are located through job creation, increased wages and tax revenue. Taken together, these programs are enabling us to make real change happen at our firm, in our industry and in the industries we serve, and in our larger communities.

What does Black History Month mean to you?

Black History to me is just History ... and it is everyone's history. In addition to being important and relevant history it is also a necessary celebration of the achievements and positive contributions of people whose impact is often undervalued, misrepresented, or ignored. This past December, my family and I traveled to Ghana in West Africa. This trip was important and served as a reminder that Black History did not start with slavery or end with the Civil Rights movement. There is a rich history that has a continued global impact and is largely untold. Black History Month is an opportunity for education, celebration, and restoration of the untold stories.

FUN FACT: Similar to many others, I am currently obsessed with Wordle and I'm pretty good – usually get it in two or three tries.

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What can industry leaders do to increase diversity in finance?

There are a number of things that can be done. For example:

- Make it a real priority – diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging is not the effort of a few but rather the passion of the many.
- Create a culture of belonging – organizations need to be thoughtful about whether their culture is one that is truly inclusive and collaborative.
- Do more than just hire – focus also on your talent pipeline, providing development and promotion support of current employees, mentoring and sponsoring, and corporate social responsibility efforts.
- Be more than an ally who serves as a supportive bystander. Consider doing more with active advocacy and finding ways to impact systemic change.
- Support your DEI professionals with access to organizational leadership, proper funding and resources. In my role, I work directly with our Managing Partner, Pat Quinn, and members of our Management Committee on DEI initiatives. Real change happens when you have support and collaboration from the top decision-makers

This year's theme for Black History Month is Black Health and Wellness. How can we better prioritize Black Health and Wellness in the finance industry?

The first and most immediate priority must be education. As we know all too well, there are stark discrepancies in treatment for Black people that continue to exist in the U.S. healthcare system – something that became self-evident due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to do something about it, we need to fully understand it – where it began, why it persists, and so on. In terms of external support, many of our organizations have philanthropic arms or make charitable contributions to worthy causes and initiatives. One area to consider is to support organizations that are focused on helping to raise awareness, promoting dialogue or changing the narrative around the management and reduction of stress, pain, trauma, and other health challenges that disproportionately impact Black people. For internal teams, it is critical to find ways to help reduce workplace bias – a well-known source of stress and stress-related disorders for people of color. This can be done with targeted training on unconscious bias or creating intentional spaces and courageous conversations for people to uncover the needs and sentiments of people of color. Finally, if you are not already doing so, be transparent about the mental health resources available at your respective organizations for all employees. One silver lining arising from the pandemic has been the more open conversation about mental health in the finance industry and all industries.