

Accelerating Social Change

An Interview with **Judee Ann Williams and Aubree Curtis**,
Global Co-Founders and Co-Heads, CAA Social Impact, Creative Artists Agency

EDITORS' NOTE *Judee Ann Williams is a senior executive with 20 years of experience within the worlds of impact, pop culture and brand strategy. In 2018, Williams was appointed to the Board of Trustees of Save the Children. She has served on the Boards of the Carrie Underwood Foundation, Katy Perry's Foundation, First Book, and the USO Entertainment Council. She also serves as an Adjunct Professor of Sports and Philanthropy at George Washington University. Williams earned a BS degree in political science from Shepherd University.*

Aubree Curtis is an industry veteran, whose work over the past two decades at Creative Artists Agency has straddled the fields of entertainment and sports marketing, brand strategy, social impact and CSR. She is a Member of the Board of Habitat Humanity International. Curtis earned a BA degree in cultural anthropology and marketing from Duke University.

AGENCY BRIEF *Positioned at the nexus of talent, content, brands, technology, sports, and live events, CAA (caa.com) creates limitless opportunities for the storytellers, trendsetters, icons, and thought leaders who shape popular culture. Across film, television, music, sports, digital media, marketing, and beyond, CAA represents thousands of the world's leading actors, directors, writers, producers, musical artists, comedians, authors, athletes, coaches, broadcasters, teams, leagues, chefs, designers, fashion talent, consumer brands, and more. Since its founding in 1975, CAA has continued to deliver on its promise that every client is represented by the whole agency. With a global network of employees and strategic partners in North America, Europe, Asia, and beyond, CAA taps its unequalled internal and external ecosystem of experts, relationships, access, and industry intelligence to help ensure that its clients achieve their goals.*



Judee Ann Williams



Aubree Curtis

What was your vision for creating CAA Social Impact and how do you define its mission?

Curtis: Our mission, simply put, is to help our clients solve their biggest challenges and inspire them to use their business influence to have the greatest impact. Our team at CAA Social Impact specializes in helping brands define and amplify what they want to stand for as it relates to issues of people and planet. We operate from the belief that to prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also demonstrate how it positively contributes to a better society. From evaluating the full business vertical, employee engagement, purpose marketing campaigns and storytelling – through the lens of culture – our team is uniquely suited to help brands and business leaders take a long view on impact.

As Co-Founders and Global Co-Heads of CAA Social Impact, how do you focus your efforts?

Williams: We started CAA Social Impact as an offering that sits at the intersection of brand marketing and social responsibility, and our backgrounds rooted us in those two different, but increasingly overlapping, disciplines. Initially, we

leaned into our individual expertise, as we were getting the business started – approaching clients either aligned to a company's purpose-oriented brand marketing efforts or their philanthropy and CSR efforts. However, over time, and as we predicted, that intersection has become less distinct, with corporate leaders understanding that their impact efforts define their brand and business, and that it needs to be painted with one strategic brush, rather than two. Accordingly, our roles have become more interchangeable, and we spend much of our time cultivating new client relationships, leading and growing our team, and doing the most important aspect of our job – servicing clients.

What is the value for CAA Social Impact to sit at the intersection of CAA Brand Consulting and the CAA Foundation?

Curtis: People and planetary issues are intersectional and complex. We essentially brought together two teams and ways of looking at social impact to create what we felt was a collaborative and more informed perspective. The ability to actually change an issue is not solved singularly by an individual business or organization. It's the bringing together of heads and resources to tackle challenges collaboratively that yields positive change.

We approach our business with a similar mentality – that having just a business and brand lens without the application of true social good thinking eliminates the “why” of impact; and just having a social good bent without business/brand application eliminates the “how” we can accelerate social change.

How did CAA Social Impact adapt to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic and how proud are you to see the resilience of your team during this unprecedented time?

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Williams: First, we are always proud of the individuals on our team, but know that this moment in time has not only called for personal resilience, but also the need to answer the call of our clients who are challenged by responding to a global pandemic. We have never been busier as a team, and the work has never felt more critical.

In this moment, as our world is literally changing on a daily basis, we are grateful to see brands being thoughtful and intentional about the shifts they need to make. We are currently in the midst of helping a large number of brand clients navigate various fronts from dealing with COVID-19 ramifications, supporting vulnerable populations, urgent planet needs, social inequalities and justice platforms to a variety of non-partisan efforts for brands in the civic engagement space.

Will you provide some examples of the work that CAA Social Impact has done with its clients?

Curtis: For one of our team’s original clients, Delta Air Lines, we advised on their volunteerism/employee engagement programming and helped create their signature impact engagement platform called “Delta’s Force for Global Good.” We also launched Hudson’s Bay Company’s mental health work and CEO profile in the impact space and advised the PGA TOUR on their milestone announcement and roll out of \$3 billion in giving.

Williams: We also worked closely with Walmart on their work to engage their employees and how they show up in their top markets to give back. For AppHarvest, North America’s largest greenhouse, which opened in Fall of 2020, we helped bring in premiere brand partners, investors and thought leadership opportunities for the CEO and operations team. Further, we have worked on behalf of KPMG, helping amplify its Community

Impact program for their 100,000+ employees, as well as advancing their efforts in the literacy and education space.

Who is the CAA Social Impact client and how broad is the target market?

Curtis: Our clients include CMOs and Chief Communications Officers, senior level marketers, and more recently appointed heads of impact or CSR at corporate brands. Mostly, they are leaders who understand that their success in building resilient, modern brands is increasingly dependent on an interconnected set of stakeholders – internally and externally – who value the role that brands/businesses play in solving for social and planetary issues.

Williams: They are also top executives who lead by a defined set of values that give way to business practices, and who become thought leaders in issue spaces that impact their business. Our most ideal clients are those same leaders who are deeply and relentlessly committed to the responsibility to do good business.

The target market is broadening, as the importance of the application of impact strategies to all aspects of a business is growing. We are integrating our social impact team into broader work within Creative Artists Agency – servicing talent clients who are starting purpose-led businesses, or sports leagues who are trying to define new ways to engage sponsors and partners through shared values.

Will you provide an overview of the talent and expertise of the CAA Social Impact team?

Curtis: Our team are a group of the best and brightest social impact minds who come from different backgrounds including strategy, creative, and media, and intersect with a broader team who offer full-service marketing and communications

including content creation, cultural and consumer insights, communications, experiential, and data and analytics.

You both devote your time and resources to supporting many causes. Will you highlight some of this work and what makes giving back so important to you?

Williams: We’ve both been fortunate to work with so many transformational organizations who work tirelessly to better their communities on a daily basis. Every day, we feel an urgent sense of responsibility to help advance their mission critical work via the private sector. Growing up in Appalachia with an extraordinary community, who to this day is still deeply embedded in my DNA, I’ve always been drawn to organizations like Save the Children who do critical work across our most vulnerable communities. Now as a mom, I’m even more committed to doing whatever it takes to make sure every child is given a fighting chance.

Curtis: For us, the only way to do business is to put people first, and as leaders, we feel that orientation translates to results and stronger performance. So, to be fair, a lot of what we do is not about “giving back,” but about finding ways to drive business while aligning our values and ethics. Business necessitates choices, but we can choose to support positive outcomes. And, of course, we can also commit our personal time and money to issues that we care about as individuals. We are both mothers, and being a working mom is such a grounding orientation to the rest of the world. There is no other way forward but to challenge the systems that threaten the future for our kids. I support affordable housing and give my time to Habitat for Humanity International because there is nothing more important than shelter as a stable foundation for people and their health, education and human rights. ●

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