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Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity Announces Inaugural Class of Fellows

Twenty-nine advocates, organizers and artists selected from across the US and South Africa to tackle anti-Black racism and white supremacy

NEW YORK, NY — The Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity (AFRE) named its first cohort of 29 [Atlantic Fellows](#) to begin a year-long program, expanding their work to challenge racism in the U.S. and South Africa and disrupt the rise of white nationalism and supremacy.

The inaugural group is composed of activists, lawyers, artists, scholars, advocates and other leaders, all accomplished in their work to end white supremacy and racism in the United States and South Africa. The cohort is the first of 10 in a 10-year, \$60-million program centered on exposing and ending racial discrimination and violence that dehumanize Black people and, ultimately, harm all people.

“The United States and South Africa share a long history of racism, inequality and white supremacy, all of which have reached a boiling point in recent years. But we also are witnessing a new generation of leaders standing up to break this corrosive cycle of injustice,” said Kavitha Mediratta, PhD, executive director of the Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity program. “These extraordinary individuals demonstrate great courage and, by awarding these fellowships, we hope to help them achieve our collective goal of a truly just and inclusive society for all.”

[See the full list of fellows here](#), and below.

Fellows receive a financial award and participate in learning tours in the U.S. and South Africa, immersive courses with senior leaders in the field, mentorship, and more.

“Many of us have already been working to eliminate anti-Black racism,” said Alicia Garza, an Atlantic Fellow and special projects coordinator for National Domestic Workers Alliance and co-founder of the Black Lives Matter Global Network. “This fellowship is an opportunity for us to learn from one another, share solutions and experiment — so we can be successful in our efforts to help create the world we dream of.”

Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity is one of six [Atlantic Fellows](#) programs, which together will create a global community of leaders to advance fairer, healthier, more inclusive societies around the world. The program is funded by [The Atlantic Philanthropies](#), which will invest over \$600 million, alongside other partner organizations and governments, to support the work of the global network of thousands of Atlantic Fellows over the next two decades and beyond. This investment—in both the Atlantic Fellows and the institutions that will support and nurture them—is the foundation’s final and biggest investment ever.

The program is a unique partnership of five leading racial justice organizations—Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity (BOLD), Center for Community Change, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Nelson Mandela Foundation, and the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at University of California, Berkeley—and Columbia University, where its U.S. offices are based.

“Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity creates opportunities for this new generation of leaders to overcome structural racism and create a future in which our narratives, policies and practices are more inclusive,” said Christopher G. Oechsli, president and CEO of The Atlantic Philanthropies, and chair of AFRE’s governing board. “We are honored to bring together this first group of Fellows and support their work to build fairer societies.”

The inaugural cohort of fellows includes: **Obenewa Amponsah**, executive director, Africa Office, Harvard University Center for African Studies; **Asanda Benya**, lecturer, University of Cape Town; **Devon Carbado**, associate vice chancellor & professor of law, UCLA School of Law; **Dara Cooper**, national organizer, National Black Food and Justice Alliance; **Marisa Franco**, director, Mijente; **Alicia Garza**, special projects director, National Domestic Workers’ Alliance; **Dallas Goldtooth**, campaign organizer, Indigenous Environmental Network; **Mary Hooks**, co-director, Southerners On New Ground; **Christopher John**, chief institutional administrator, AFDA (The School of Creative Economies); **Brian Kamanzi**, Master of Science in Engineering Candidate, University of Cape Town; **Kelly-Eve Koopman**, director and co-creator, Coloured Mentality; **Talila Lewis**, co-founder and volunteer director, Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of Deaf Communities (HEARD); **Rukia Lumumba**, founder, People’s Advocacy Institute; **Ntombikanina Malinga**, president & CEO, Sastela; **Joel Modiri**, lecturer, University of Pretoria; **Neo Muyanga**, composer-in-residence, Johannesburg International Mozart Festival & the National Arts Festival of South Africa; **Marlon Peterson**, president, The Precedential Group; **Christopher Petrella**, lecturer, American Cultural Studies & Associate Director of Equity and Diversity Programs, Bates College; **Rasheedah Phillips**, managing attorney, Community Legal Services of Philadelphia; **Alberto Retana**, president & CEO, Community Coalition; **Rashad Robinson**, executive director, Color of Change; **Favianna Rodriguez**, executive director, CultureStrike; **Siyabonga Shange**, youth pastor, Grace Family Church; **Holiday Simmons**, organizer & transgender rights activist and program manager, Generative Somatics; **Michael Smith**, executive director, MBK Alliance & director, Youth Opportunities Program, Obama Foundation; **Thenmozhi Soundararajan**, executive director, Equality Labs; **Sarah Summers**, co-creator, Coloured Mentality; **Richard Wallace**, deputy director, Workers Center for Racial Justice; **Stha “Sthandiwe” Yeni**, national coordinator, Tshintsha Amakhaya.

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Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity is a non-residential year-long program that will support a total of 350 fellows over its 10-year lifespan, annually supporting 35 fellows from the United States and South Africa. The program brings together organizers, artists, advocates and other change agents working to build a more just and equitable world by confronting and dismantling anti-Black racism. The program gives these leaders the time, space and connection to others in the field to encourage brainstorming and inspire forward-looking planning and new ideas to deepen their work, and better position them to drive powerful and transformative change. <https://racialequity.atlanticfellows.org/>

The Atlantic Philanthropies are dedicated to advancing opportunity, equity and human dignity. Established in 1982, when Chuck Feeney quietly committed virtually all of his

family's assets to the foundation, Atlantic has since made grants over \$8 billion. In keeping with Mr. Feeney's "Giving While Living," big bet philosophy, Atlantic invested in systemic change to accelerate improvements in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The foundation, which has operated in Australia, Bermuda, Cuba, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United States and Viet Nam, completed its grantmaking in 2016 and will all conclude operations in the next few years.