

# James C. Rhee

Greater Boston

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## Summary

Pls email [debbie.greene@unitedtalent.com](mailto:debbie.greene@unitedtalent.com) for speech requests.

James Rhee is an acclaimed impact investor, founder, CEO, goodwill strategist, and educator who empowers people, brands, and organizations by marrying capital with purpose. He is an award-winning thought leader on topics such as multidimensional transformation, the intersection of capital, race, and gender, the future of capitalism, and values-based investing and leadership. The story of the remarkable transformation and re-imagining of Ashley Stewart, one of the country's largest clothing brands serving plus-sized Black women, under James's enlightened leadership as chairman, CEO and investor (2013-2020), has served as proof to millions of people, as well as the world's leading businesses and organizations, that one can do better by being better.

James has dedicated his life to making knowledge, opportunity, and capital accessible to all. His practical theories on Money, Life, and Joy marry capitalism with ethics and offer individuals, brands and organizations an actual playbook on how to drive dramatic transformation by identifying and unleashing purpose through the union of mathematical and creative systems.

James bridges seemingly unconnected people, communities, and industries under an inclusive and innovative umbrella. James serves as a member of the Advisory Council of JPMorgan Chase's Advancing Black Pathways, a Founding Member of Ashoka E-to-E, and the Advisory Board of CEO Action for Racial Equity. He is a Strategic Advisor to start-ups creating the world in which we want our children to live, and formerly served as Chair of the Innovation Committee of the National Retail Federation, and a board member of Conscious Capitalism and the American Repertory Theater. He is a client of both UTA and LGR Literary.

As an investor, James helped manage billions of dollars of growth and distressed capital at two leading Boston-based institutions before ultimately founding his own impact platform called FirePine Group, where he has stewarded the capital of some of the world's most sophisticated investors. He has been the lead investor and a board director across multiple successful platform investments. Before his career in business and finance, James Rhee was a high school teacher and an editor of the Harvard Law Review.

He is writing a book and devotes time to Howard University as the Johnson Chair and Professor of Entrepreneurship. He also serves on the faculty at MIT Sloan School of Management as a Senior Lecturer and EIR @ MIT Leadership Center.

## Experience



### Founder

the red helicopter

Sep 2021 - Present (1 year 5 months)

where media and education meet Kindness & Math

[www.redhelicopter.com](http://www.redhelicopter.com)



## **Johnson Chair of Entrepreneurship | Senior Advisor to Global Center for Women....**

Howard University

Jul 2021 - Present (1 year 7 months)



## **Senior Lecturer. Senior Advisor; Executive-in-Residence of MIT Leadership Center**

MIT Sloan School of Management

Dec 2020 - Present (2 years 2 months)

Organizational Dynamics, Center for Leadership



## **Elected Founding Member - Entrepreneur to Entrepreneur (E2) Network**

Ashoka

Dec 2022 - Present (2 months)

The E2 Network brings together high-impact entrepreneurs from the business sector with the world's most powerful social entrepreneurs at Ashoka.



## **Founder and CEO**

FirePine Group, a company

2009 - Present (14 years)

Founded in 2009, FirePine Group, LLC ("FirePine") invests in special situations requiring structured capital and operational catalysts, with a particular focus in the rapidly transforming, branded retail-consumer product industry. Using algorithmic, technological, marketing and cultural change, FirePine helps companies formulate and apply bespoke, data-driven long-term solutions in a consensus-driven process. With expertise in growth and distress, FirePine leverages a proprietary valuation system to focus first on defining or redefining core value and then harvesting it through customer analytics with an integrated marketing strategy and a comprehensive assessment of operational process flow.

A flexible mandate and broad experience set allows for FirePine to invest in creative securities and forge symbiotic solutions with a diverse set of partners, including entrepreneurs, regulated lending institutions, workout groups, activist hedge funds and control and non-control equity investors. We have invested the capital of some of the world's most sophisticated investors and their family offices.

Critical to our success is the ability to marry data with operations and people with strategy. We deliver both capital and change at important inflection points in a company's life, and always with a long-term outlook.

With a well-documented investment and operating track record, and a reputation for fair dealing and straight talk, FirePine empowers businesses and their principals to author and then execute the strategies necessary to leverage core strength into future growth. We excel in change management, and our involvement attracts smart operating resources and smart capital. In select circumstances, we will invest time without capital.

Visit us at [www.firepinegroup.com](http://www.firepinegroup.com)



### **Member**

JP Morgan Chase Advancing Black Pathways Council

Feb 2019 - Present (4 years)



### **Member of Governing Committee**

CEO Action - Racial Equity

2020 - Present (3 years)



### **Senior Lecturer**

Duke University School of Law

2016 - Present (7 years)

Course: "The Way the World Works" (Money, Life, Joy and valuing enterprises)



### **Board Member**

Conscious Capitalism, Inc.

Jan 2021 - May 2022 (1 year 5 months)

<https://www.consciouscapitalism.org/boardofdirectors>

### **NRF Board Member + Chairman Innovation Advisory Council**

National Retail Federation

Jan 2017 - Aug 2020 (3 years 8 months)



### **Executive Chairman and CEO**

Ashley Stewart, Inc.

Aug 2013 - Jul 2020 (7 years)

The unprecedented transformation of Ashley Stewart is proof of how trust and joy, grounded in math and amplified through digital excellence, can overcome impossible odds and fuel individual and enterprise-wide innovation. It is a tangible example of the power of diverse ecosystems, as well as a commentary on a potential way forward for achieving multi-stakeholder goals. At its core, it is also the story of an unlikely friendship between a first generation Asian-American private equity investor (who raised his hand to become the self-described "least qualified CEO") and a predominantly Black female employee group who placed their mutual trust in each other, learned from one another, and then proceeded to quietly shock the world.

His inspirational story has been featured in media outlets such as the Good Business Issue of Bloomberg BusinessWeek, Harvard Business Review, Boston Globe, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, CNN, Thrive Global, USA Today, Inc. Magazine, Forbes, Women's Wear Daily, Morgan Stanley's Access and Opportunity Podcast, ABC News, National Urban League's State of Black America, and the Huffington Post.

James is a regional winner of the E&Y Entrepreneur of the Year Award, the winner of one of five 2016 Power Player Awards granted by the National Retail Federation, and the recipient of the 2017 Black Retail Action Group Business Achievement Award, the 2018 Temple Fox School of Business

Information Technology Innovator Award, the 2018 Essex County Urban League Centennial William M. Ashby Award for community building and a 2019 One To World Fulbright Award.



### **Managing Director; Principal of Gordon Brothers Group**

GB Merchant Partners

2009 - 2012 (3 years)



### **Senior Investment Professional**

2000 - 2007 (7 years)



### **Associate**

Merrill Lynch

1998 - 2000 (2 years)

Mergers & Acquisitions Group



### **Summer Associate**

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP

Jul 1997 - Aug 1997 (2 months)



### **Summer Associate**

Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP

May 1997 - Jul 1997 (3 months)



### **Teacher**

Wilbraham & Monson Academy

Aug 1993 - Jun 1995 (1 year 11 months)

## **Education**



### **Harvard University**

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)

1989 - 1993



### **Harvard Law School**

Juris Doctor, Editor-at-Large, Harvard Law Review

1995 - 1998

## **Skills**

Private Equity • Strategy • Mergers & Acquisitions • Valuation • Management • Investments • Restructuring • Marketing Strategy • Strategic Planning • Entrepreneurship

## **Honors & Awards**



**EY Entrepreneur of the Year - Regional - EY**

Jul 2016



**National Retail Federation Power Player - National Retail Federation Foundation**

Jan 2016



**Black Retail Action Group Business Achievement Award - BRAG**

Oct 2017



**Essex County Urban League Centennial William M. Ashby Community Builder Award - Essex County Urban League**

Nov 2018



**Temple Fox School of Business IT Innovator of the Year - Fox Business School**

Apr 2018



**One-to-World Fulbright Honoree - One to World**

Apr 2019



**Frederick Douglass Award - New York Urban League**

Jun 2022

Co Honorees were Phylicia Rashad and Rashida Jones.



**Inclusive Entrepreneur of the Year Award - GlobalMindED**

Jun 2022