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**PIPELINE**

A BLACK PROFESSIONALS IN PRIVATE EQUITY & FINANCE PODCAST

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## **Bringing Out the Best for Under-Capitalized Communities, with BlackRock's Ladell Robbins**

Voice Over ([00:00](#)):

This is Accessing the Pipeline, a podcast for black professionals in private equity and finance brought to you by McGuireWoods. Each episode features special guests offering insights into accessing capital, developing and expanding relationships, opportunities, and driving growth for black-owned businesses. Tune in to access the possibilities.

Abdul Lediju ([00:24](#)):

Hi, welcome to a new episode of Accessing the Pipeline. My name is Abdul Lediju. I'm a partner in the corporate and private equity department at McGuireWoods, where I focus on advising sponsors and investors in fund formation and investment management matters. Please join me and my fellow McGuireWoods' partner, Dan Howell, and welcoming to the podcast Ladell Robbins from BlackRock. Ladell is a managing director and the head of the BlackRock Impact Opportunities Strategy. Welcome, Ladell, and we're excited for the conversation today.

Ladell Robbins ([00:59](#)):

Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here.

Abdul Lediju ([01:02](#)):

Before we get started, I want to give my co-host Dan a moment to introduce himself and his practice.

Dan Howell ([01:07](#)):

Thanks, Abdul. And good morning to Ladell and our listeners. My name is Dan Howell and I'm a partner focused on M&A and private equity transactions here at McGuireWoods. Welcome, Ladell. We're honored to have you on the podcast and we're looking forward to our conversation. And Ladell, from what we've been able to glean publicly and from our prior offline conversations, it sounds like you've had an incredible journey. Could you give our listeners a full view of your background and how you arrived where you are today?

Ladell Robbins ([01:35](#)):

Yes. Thank you so much. And first, foremost, thank you all so much for the invitation to be here. It is a real pleasure and honor. And I really enjoy what you all do with the podcast and sharing important and relevant information to those of us

who have chosen to be in this broader deal making industry. So my name is Ladell Robbins. Again, at BlackRock, I oversee our BlackRock Impact Opportunity Strategy, which we call BIO for short. And it has been a long journey to get to this point.

[\(02:06\)](#):

So a little bit about myself, I'm from a very small town in the eastern part of North Carolina called Fremont, about 900 people. So you have more partners in your law firm or employees in your law firm that in my hometown. Grew up working in agriculture, like many folks do from that part of the state of North Carolina. But to fast-forward to some of the pivotal moments that brought me to where I am today, I was very fortunate that the state of North Carolina established a school called the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. And why I highlight that was that that school probably changed the trajectory of my life.

[\(02:49\)](#):

First, it put me in the same class as some of my closest friends in life, one of whom is instrumental to how I ultimately ended up deciding to go into finance. We both started high school wanting to be attorneys, and then we both interned in the banking world and decided that finance was the way to go. And through that relationship, I was fortunate to be offered an investment banking analyst position at JP Morgan after graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. And why that is important is from a career perspective, everything literally springboards from there. And let me explain why I say that. First, is that put me in the business and I went to go work for one of our clients, Lucent Technologies, prior to going to business school at Harvard. While at Harvard, one of my analyst classmates is a Nigerian American and he introduced me to the woman who is now my wife. And it was that moment that after business school, when my career pivoted to working internationally and we got married, I had my traditional wedding in Nigeria and that started the Africa experience.

[\(04:08\)](#):

And I spent several years on the continent first as a banker, then as an entrepreneur, and then finally as a private equity executive, all the way up until 2019 when I returned to the US. And when I returned to the US, I wanted to focus on investing in and around economic inequality in America. And that took me to the city of Newark, New Jersey, where I worked in their economic development corporation. And from there, when BlackRock decided to raise the BlackRock Impact Opportunity Strategy, I guess they were looking for someone that had private equity skills, but was community oriented, and yours truly got the phone call about being the lead portfolio manager, and now I look after the fund. And just to tell you a little bit about the BlackRock Impact Opportunity Strategy, it is a multi-strategy investment fund that is focused on improving outcomes for groups that we define as under capitalized. In this first vintage of the fund, we wanted to focus on under capitalization through a racial equity lens so we were looking for investment opportunities in and around people of color in the United States, specifically black, Native American and Hispanic. I'm sure we can talk a little bit more about the investment strategy subsequent later on in the interview, but that's what I've had the privilege of leading at BlackRock.

Abdul Lediju [\(05:37\)](#):

Excellent. Thank you for that incredible background and sharing your arc and trajectory to where you are today. Ladell, can you give us some insight into what the common ingredients are for a deal on your team at BlackRock? Please give us an example of a landmark transaction that you've done that stands out.

Ladell Robbins [\(05:56\)](#):

Sure. So a little bit about the BlackRock Impact Opportunity Strategy. So one of the things that we have is what we call the two doors. The first door is about ownership and leadership. The second door is about who you focus on and serving. The BlackRock Impact Opportunity Strategy, it is a return seeking fund, even though it has impact in the name, but we have that double bottom line objective. So as a basic criteria, the first thing that we are looking for is whether or not it falls into our buy box. Now, because we are a multi-asset class fund, we get to look at private equity opportunities, private credit opportunities, and basically anything that fits within the broader alternative space. So we do have a very large area of coverage in terms of the types of assets that we can put into the fund. While we do have a strategic asset allocation that sits underneath, so we can't do all private equity opportunities or all infra debt opportunities, we do have the ability to look at a wide range of opportunities. Within that, what we are focused on is whether the business or project is either owned, led, or largely managed by someone that identifies as either black, Native American or Hispanic in the United States, or you do not meet those criteria however, you focus on communities of color in the United States. So that is the basic entry point into the fund.

[\(07:30\)](#):

We raise just shy of \$800 million for the fund, and we're looking to invest around one billion through internal and external co-investment. So from an average deal size perspective, our buy box is about 20 to 100 million. So that effectively rules out most venture or startup opportunities and we're in the growth equity to buy out space, medium-sized businesses or small to medium-sized businesses, as I guess that they would be defined by industrial classification. Now, beyond those fundamental criteria of it meets our size objective, our impact objective is in an asset class that we have expertise. Obviously, like any other private equity investor, we're looking for that combination where we feel we have alignment with the management team, we have the skills and resources to help create value for the investments and ultimately we see a way that there's going to be a liquidity event so that we ultimately can return our invested capital plus profits back to clients. Similarly, because of our impact mandate, we want to know along the way, we have generated impact consistent with what we underwrote at the time of the investment. So there's a lot that goes into it for a fund like ours that is multi-asset class, but also has an impact objective. But fundamentally, those are the key things that we're thinking about as we go through evaluating an opportunity for the BlackRock Impact opportunity Strategy.

[\(09:11\)](#):

Last thing, if you don't mind, I'll just make a joke because obviously given the size of BlackRock, 13 and a half trillion, sometimes there's this perception that we have just this big pot of money that we can all go and pitch ideas to ... I wish that was the case because I'd be working on my pitch game if that was the case. But really you have so many investment strategies that are very specific that sit underneath. Another investor from BlackRock, if they were sitting here, they would be telling you what is very specific with respect to the investment strategy that they look after. I always like to put that out there because I get a lot of inquiries like, "You guys got 13 and a half trillion, you could just do whatever." It's much more complicated than that as you appreciate.

Abdul Lediju [\(09:57\)](#):

Absolutely.

Dan Howell [\(09:58\)](#):

Yeah. And a quick follow up on that, would love to hear a little bit more on how you quantify impacts and then how do you wrestle between showing that there's impact and the obvious need to provide a return to your investors, just the interplay between those two competing goals.

Ladell Robbins ([10:15](#)):

Yeah. Well, the key in finding an appropriate investment is that the underlying impact thesis that you underwrite, it has to be a driver of returns because if it's not, you're going to find a lack of alignment with create objectives. And as you all appreciate, this is a very hard business. Investing, finding opportunities, making deals, driving value, keeping everybody aligned as you go through the journey of an investment. I often say it's like a marriage, and then ultimately getting to a realization, those are really, really hard things to do. When you add in an impact layer of you're also trying to accomplish some type of specific non-financial objective, it makes it even that much harder. So we're trying to find investment opportunities where the impact objectives that we set for the fund are actually drivers of return because then we know that if we are pressing to deliver on our impact objectives, we're also creating value for the investment and vice versa. So that is what we're looking for as it relates to ensuring that we can achieve our impact goals, as well as our financial objectives. And I underscore the financial objectives part because our clients committed to the BlackRock impact opportunity strategies because they wanted to find opportunities that would generate returns while also improving economic outcomes.

([11:56](#)):

So to do that, we use a framework called the Impact Management Project Framework, which has the five dimensions of impact. And so when we're evaluating a deal, I often say it goes through an economic underwriting, which is your typical financial outlook and then an impact underwriting, which is according to the five dimensions of impact, what are we trying to achieve? How much are we trying to achieve? What do we anticipate will be the contributions of the impact? What are the risks to not ultimately achieving those impact objectives? Now, you had asked about an opportunity, and I'll tell you, I'll probably use that to describe an opportunity that was a landmark investment. While I love all of the investments that we've made in the fund, and we've made 14 discrete investments for the fund, the one that I highlight is one where we actually round tripped, and that is our investment with a group named Indian Energy, where we built a solar microgrid project for the Viejas Tribe, which is located in Southern California. So Indian Energy, when they approached us, two Native American founders of that business, and effectively they had a significant amount of experience in building renewable energy projects, particularly those associated with solar energy. And they have put together a pretty complicated capital stack consisting of local and federal grants in order to build this solar microgrid project for the Viejas tribe.

([13:36](#)):

Why I consider it one of our landmark opportunities is we believe that that was the first project to actually fully go through and benefit from the federal government's Tribal Loan Guarantee Program. And it also brought out the best of BlackRock. One of the principles at BlackRock is one BlackRock where we all work together across the platform to deliver for clients. And so while I cut my teeth mostly in private equity, we have colleagues that cut their teeth and still work in the infrastructure debt space, and they helped us with not only the underwriting of the project, but also connecting some of the dots, including with the Department of Energy. So what we basically did with this investment was we provided, I'll call it bridge loan capital to help fill out the capital stack while the project was being built so that it could ultimately successfully apply for a guarantee from the Department of Energy under the Tribal Loan Guarantee Program, and that enabled the takeout financing from a commercial lender to actually come into place. So all in, it was about a \$25 million investment for us, which was a significant investment in the Native American community. One of the larger investments we've made at BlackRock in the Native American community. And along the way, we unlocked a variety of tax credits associated with renewable energy projects.

([15:08](#)):

We were successful with unlocking a guarantee from the Department of Energy under the Tribal Loan Guarantee Program, and finally got the project fully funded, and we delivered a 14% return on that bridge capital for our clients. So that is one where we sourced it, we underwrote it, we executed it, we've delivered money back to our clients. So I'll use that one as my example. And from finally on the impact side, I think it's probably obvious. One, we're providing cleaner energy to the community that we ultimately built the project for. Secondly, we helped a Native American sponsor execute on probably one of the larger deals that they've done by providing that 25 million of capital to ultimately unlock what is a hundred million dollar project. And then third, because of the incentives associated with that renewable energy project, all in lower cost of energy to the ultimate beneficiaries of the project.

Dan Howell ([16:17](#)):

One other question that we wanted to ask is, it sounds like you're not beholden to one particular strategy or asset class as you think about how to deploy your capital. So, what are some of the most compelling opportunities and alternative investments over the next few years that you see and what differentiates managers who are best positioned to succeed?

Ladell Robbins ([16:42](#)):

Yeah. So I guess I should say working at BlackRock in a way, it's almost like having God's eye on private investments. When I first joined BlackRock and I just saw the number of investment opportunities that flow through the platform, it's mesmerizing. So I think within the private markets business overall, we source, I think it's about 10,000 opportunities for the platform in its entirety. We've looked at going on 1,200 opportunities just for the BlackRock Impact Opportunities Fund. And as I mentioned, we invested in 14, so you get to see a lot of things. That being said, over the past two years, BlackRock has acquired two large platforms. One, which is a leading infrastructure platform, Global Infrastructure Partners, and then the second one is a leading private credit platform, HPS Investment Partners. Both of those were about \$12 billion acquisitions. So I would say as a firm, we see opportunities in infrastructure, and we see opportunities in private credit.

([17:50](#)):

And I would agree with that, because I believe that we are at a point where clients are looking for solutions for the entire portfolio and infrastructure and private credit, those offer the nice combination of both total return as well as current yield. So I would say overall, I too am supportive of the opportunities that exist in infrastructure and private credit. And as you think also about what's happening, not only in our country, but around the world with respect to infrastructure needs and demands, as well as the strain that are on federal and local and state resources, many projects are going to have to be built with capital coming from the private sector. And so I think infrastructure, as an example, fits squarely into that, especially those infrastructure firms that have the capabilities of not only managing assets, but also developing new infrastructure. So certainly see opportunities in those two asset classes.

([19:02](#)):

Now, let me bring it down to the BlackRock Impact Opportunities Strategy. And I would say there, as a general point, having lived and breathed this strategy for five years, we have a real investment opportunity in this country around economic mobility and addressing broader under capitalization. Because much like I answered your question about broad themes, I think many other investors if they were sitting in this chair would probably say something similar. The one thing that we don't talk enough about is how relationship networks underpin deal making. And as a result of that, I'm not sure that we can truly say that capital flows everywhere it needs to flow. A lot of it is flowing around the relationship dynamics that exist around people who have the ability to allocate capital.

[\(19:59\)](#):

So I would say in terms of the area of opportunity that I see through the lens that we have with the BlackRock Impact Opportunities Fund and having sourced 1200 opportunities, there are certainly business and projects that exist at the smaller end of the market that are going to ultimately address needs around economic mobility, and that may be job skilling and upskilling, that may be more localized infrastructure where we're improving the environments where people live, work, and play, or the infrastructure that provides them the critical services that they need. But I believe that there is a significant investment opportunity around ensuring that everyone, certainly in the United States, has the ability to achieve their economic potential because capital is not a barrier.

Abdul Lediju [\(20:56\)](#):

Yeah. Well said. Very interesting. I think want to come back to something you described earlier when you were describing ... We were talking about your trajectory, how you landed where you are today at BlackRock and you mentioned that you spent a number of years in Africa working in private equity and now you're here stateside. I think for our audience, it'd be really interesting to hear you opine a bit on some of the similarities and distinctions or differences in PE in Africa and here stateside and just overall that experience, some of the learnings you took from that chapter in your journey and how you've applied it to your current.

Ladell Robbins [\(21:41\)](#):

Yeah. Great. Well, first I'll say I had the best time living, working and investing in Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically West Africa, and I was based out of Lagos, Nigeria. I would say from a similarities perspective, the first thing that I would emphasize is something that I consider to be the most important thing that I've learned about investing, which is the importance of alignment. In private markets investing, it is critical that you and your investment partners, which are your investors on one hand, and also the management teams that you're going to be working with are just aligned around what it is you're seeking out to achieve and how you're going to achieve it. It is as important in emerging markets as it is in developed markets, because that alignment is what's going to ultimately allow you to run the race and get to the finish line. So that is the one thing that I've learned regardless of where I've sat about investing that I try to keep first and foremost in my mind.

[\(22:59\)](#):

A second similarity I would say is about the entrepreneurial nature of private markets investing. This is an entrepreneurial business.

Abdul Lediju [\(23:10\)](#):

Absolutely.

Ladell Robbins [\(23:10\)](#):

In the continent of Africa where, and certainly in West Africa, where the markets are less developed, both in terms of like the infrastructure that sits around the investing ecosystem, the actual physical infrastructure, you have to get up every day and think about how you are going to make something happen. And I used to joke that if you were to go through the contacts of my phone when I was in West Africa, you'd be surprised who you'd find in there because we might have a situation where a piece of equipment for one of our portfolio companies was stuck in customs and I've got my customs guy in the phone that I'm going to call and I'm going to help the portfolio company. We're trying to get it out.

[\(23:59\)](#):

I think that same type of entrepreneurial mentality applies here as well, because you've got to go out and really press your relationships in order to find opportunities, to help create opportunities for your portfolio companies that you ultimately invest in. And even internally, in a place like BlackRock, you have to have an entrepreneurial mentality about how you're building a business. So we started with one fund, and my hope and prayer is that we'll be able to grow into broader impact investing strategies, given what we've learned. So having an entrepreneurial mentality also holds true, especially when you're dealing at the smaller end of the market where things are not as organized and laid out because there's a large banker on the process and there's company that has had McKinsey or other consultants come in several times and give you value addition, you really do have to have that entrepreneurial mentality.

[\(25:01\)](#):

Now in terms of differences. So the US market, as an example, is much more organized in the sense that you have access to information and a lot more information readily available, whereas on the continent, you've got to do bottoms up analysis. And when I say bottoms up, I really mean the more bottoms up you are, the more informed you are. So I looked after consumer and agriculture investments. I had women that worked in markets. Again, in my phone, I would call, I get insights, okay, which biscuits are moving the most, what are customers ... And I'm getting that insight so that I can understand what exactly is really happening with some of the investments that we made. Whereas here, there's a lot more research that is just certainly at your exposure and easier to access as well now with the advantages that exist with even the early days of large language models and AI. So there's information, asymmetry, there's more resources here to tap into.

[\(26:09\)](#):

But then from a pure private equity investing, I would say on the continent, you don't have access to leverage like you have here, where when you're making an investment, you can say, "Okay, I want to put three times or four times leverage on it and this is my equity slice." In many cases, you're having much less leverage to the extent that it is even available. So you've got to put more equity capital at work. So that is one difference just with respect to how deals are actually put together.

[\(26:45\)](#):

And then another difference is also currency. So when we're underwriting deals in Nigeria, when we're thinking about our cost of capital, we also have to factor in a certain amount of depreciation that can occur in the currency. Whereas here, if you're investing in US dollars or in more developed country currencies, that is less of a concern because your investors are providing you with capital in US dollars, you're investing in US dollar assets, and you're trying to just align the two. Whereas investing on the continent, you may have investors from Europe or globally, and you've got to think about the returns that you're generating in hard dollars when you have currencies that can be very vulnerable. And that is tough because when I look back at my portfolio from the continent, it will perform well from a Naira basis, but on a dollar basis, there's going to be challenges. So those are some of the differences.

Abdul Lediju [\(27:46\)](#):

Yeah. Tremendous insights. So thank you for sharing that.

Dan Howell [\(27:50\)](#):

Switching gears a little bit, beyond deal making, can you tell us about your board position with the New Jersey community capital and some drivers behind joining that board and other civic and community engagement you have?

Ladell Robbins ([28:04](#)):

Yeah. So I'm very fortunate to be working with my fellow directors and also the leadership on New Jersey Community Capital, which is the largest community development finance institution in the state of New Jersey. And why I like working on the board of NJCC is first, we have a very driven leadership team that is focused on trying to approach community oriented financing in the same way that we approach financing in the broader private markets industry. And that is figuring out how do we one, achieve greater scale as an organization so that we can actually have the infrastructure and also the financial assets to be able to do more. So back to what I mentioned earlier from an opportunity set, there is a tremendous need around localized investing where you're taking a private markets approach and filling in the gap that financial institutions just aren't going to be able to address. And that is what is going to help change the way some of our neighborhoods look and also even some of the businesses that, who knows may become larger opportunities for your more traditional private markets investors.

([29:26](#)):

So we have a talented team that is focused on thinking about community development financing with a more typical private markets investor lens, and we're also aligned around achieving scale. And for me, it allows me to, one, apply my talents that I've developed over my years in investment banking and private equity and now working at BlackRock, but in a different segment of the market that we don't really focus on or we don't focus on in the same way at a place like BlackRock. So those are two of the reasons why I enjoy being part of New Jersey Community Capital. And we're really positioned as a organization to achieve greater scale and hopefully expand our influence beyond the state of New Jersey to the tri-state area and even beyond.

Abdul Lediju ([30:22](#)):

Yeah. Ladell, let's talk about mentorship.

Ladell Robbins ([30:25](#)):

Yeah.

Abdul Lediju ([30:26](#)):

I think it's safe to say that we're all here because mentors shaped our paths. Can you talk about some of the mentors that shape your trajectory? So mentors you want to give a shout-out to, and also can you maybe give some insights on how you approach mentorship?

Ladell Robbins ([30:41](#)):

Yes. So fantastic question and such an important one as well. I have been very blessed over the course of my career to have worked with individuals that have taken an interest in me all the way through my primary education up until where I am today. But I want to give recognition to two individuals given the question. The first is a gentleman named Dog Scato. So when I started as an investment banking analyst, Dog was co-head of my team. When I joined BlackRock, Dog was a partner in one of our private investing strategies, and he also is a member of my investment committee. So we've come full circle in terms of our relationship where I started as his analyst and now he sits or he sat on our investment committee up until earlier this year.

([31:37](#)):

But things that I learned from Dog are one, the importance of relationships. This is a relationship driven business. The second is making sure that you understand what it is your clients are focused on achieving and serving your clients, because we were in an advisory capacity when our careers first began, but now we're both more on the private markets investing side. And then the third thing was just giving your all to your work. I remember when I was an analyst, I would fax Dog in the middle of the night. And I would get a reply from him first thing in the morning, if not that night while I was still there. And while I know we all want to achieve work-life balance, we are in an industry that really requires you to commit yourself and to go after it. And so he taught me that mentality at a young age. And then the last thing I would say about Dog is just his interest and compassion for young people.

[\(32:45\)](#):

Funny story, which is when I was a second year analyst, I was responsible for managing the summer interns. And at the end of the summer, I asked Dog to take our summer interns out to dinner. And it was a big request back then because that was the day and age where managing directors, they were in wooden offices and had closed doors and you didn't really touch them. But Dog was like, "Sure, I'll definitely do it." So fast-forward to just last year, we are on a phone call with our legal advisors and one of the legal advisors, he says, "Ladell, it's really good to see you again. It's been a long time." And I'm looking at him and I don't recognize him. And so I call him afterwards and I said, "Hey, did you go to school here?" He's like, "Yep, that's me." And he recalled that summer, he was one of the interns and he mentioned at the end how it was such a great experience that we organized that dinner with Dog. And now he's a partner at a law firm. So shout out to Dog Scato.

[\(34:04\)](#):

The other one is someone who I worked with in Nigeria and his name is Shegana Debanji. And what I learned from him, which is how I approach mentorship now is I try to put myself in the shoes of the person who is coming and asking for guidance. And I try to ask myself, if I were in their shoes, what can I tell them that's going to help them achieve their highest and best potential and really be open and transparent, not just about succeeding in the job, but succeeding in life. And I often tell people that if I had met Shegana Debanji earlier in my career, I probably would be a C-suite executive at BlackRock because he just had a way of pouring into me that I felt like he truly had my best interest at heart, including in our earlier conversations when I joined the private equity firm, he was like, "Listen, Ladell, the objective here is for you to take my job, right? So we're going to work so that I can step away from being head of consumer and agribusinesses and you can become it and this is how we're going to map it out." And along the way, he wanted to ensure that he was looking after me from how my marriage was going, how I was adjusting to living in Nigeria. I just truly, truly appreciated that. And it is much needed.

[\(35:45\)](#):

The last thing I'll say on this, why this is such an important question is because I feel younger people today are a little lost inside larger corporations and there needs to be a greater effort amongst those of us that are further along in our career to help provide some guidance and support, to allow them to approach their careers in ways that's going to be meaningful or meaningful and fulfilling for them, but making sure they're also being pushed so that they can be more intentional about the things that they want to accomplish. Because I often tell people, if I gave my younger self some advice, it would be to be more intentional because the more intentional you are about where you want to go, the more likely it is you're going to ultimately get there and maybe even get that faster.

Abdul Lediju [\(36:42\)](#):

Fantastic insights, especially that last point about intentionality, putting that in practice, being intentional about being intentional.

Ladell Robbins ([36:53](#)):

It's huge.

Abdul Lediju ([36:53](#)):

Sounds circular, but it's huge.

Ladell Robbins ([36:54](#)):

It's so huge.

Abdul Lediju ([36:56](#)):

I've benefited from that mentality across my career as well. So I totally agree. Thank you.

Dan Howell ([37:02](#)):

I really like the point about putting yourself in the person seeking out advice's shoes, direct takeaways for me, even in my own mentoring journey to take from that. So thank you. So I really want to thank you again for your time today. On these episodes, we always like to end with a question that opens up and allows our listeners to understand our guests a little bit more outside of their professional persona. So to that end, who are three of your favorite musical artists and why?

Ladell Robbins ([37:30](#)):

Sure. So first and foremost, I think you guys have benefited from having a Southerner on this podcast. I feel like I'm talking a lot. This might be a longer episode than you guys normally have. I was just joking here. So in terms of musical artists, one thing I'm probably going to date myself with some of the people that I say, but first, starting with the continent of Sub-Saharan Africa, many years ago, I got exposed to Fela Kuti and I just truly enjoy his music, watching him and how he performed when he was alive, what he spoke about, how he put the words together, the combination of Pigeon and English, the energy that he brought to his performances. And I guess people would say he is the forefather of what we now call Afro beats with an S. Back then, I guess it was just Afrobeat with no S, but really like Fela Kuti.

([38:32](#)):

Then secondly, for me and my childhood, it's all about Eric B. and Rakim. I still think Paid in Full is probably the best rap album that was ever made. There's been a lot of good ones, but that is one where ... They just killed it with that one. When I was younger, I wanted to have my hair cut like Rakim. I did. My mom let me get away with that. She wouldn't let me wear like the Gucci suits and the gold chins, but definitely had the haircut and we performed Paid in Full one of our school plays, which was nice because I was at a Catholic elementary school and people were like, "What was that?" But you guys enjoyed it.

([39:14](#)):

And then the last one, Anita Baker. I just think that she is such a songwriter and performer and perfectionist with respect to her music. So those would be three that if you looked at my Spotify, you would see are probably amongst the most that I listen to.

Abdul Lediju ([39:33](#)):

Yeah. You really can't beat that. Recommendations. Fela, Eric B. and Rakim and Anita Baker, you can't ... That's incredible.

Dan Howell ([39:41](#)):

Strong answer.

Abdul Lediju ([39:41](#)):

Yeah. It's a very strong answer.

Ladell Robbins ([39:42](#)):

Thank you.

Abdul Lediju ([39:43](#)):

Thank you. That's awesome. So Ladell, we just want to thank you again for joining us here on Accessing the Pipeline. We thank you for your tremendous insights. We thank you for sharing your time and most importantly, we thank you for really giving the audience a model of excellence in various facets that they can learn from. So just wanted to thank you for your time today.

Ladell Robbins ([40:10](#)):

It's been an honor. Yeah. Thank you all for having me. Thank you.

Abdul Lediju ([40:13](#)):

Appreciate it.

Voice Over ([40:19](#)):

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