

**INTRO:** This is part two of my interview with Tayo Roxon. If you have not yet listened to [part one](#), I highly recommend that you go back and do that first because it provides some very important context for this episode. That was [episode#255](#). If you have already listened to episode #255, then please enjoy the conclusion of my interview with Tayo Roxon.

**Matt Bowles:** I also want to talk to you a little bit about your professional trajectory. Can you share a little bit about that? Since we're College, how your professional trajectory has gone, and maybe talk a little bit about your role as a diversity, equity, and inclusion professional.

**Tayo Rockson:** Yeah. So, I went to school for, you know, my dad wanted me to be a lawyer. My mom wanted me to be a doctor. Typical Nigerian story. After taking some classes in pre-law, I realized I do like arguing and making cases, but it just wasn't something that was jiving with me. So, one of the classes we took was marketing and I fell in love with marketing.

So, I majored in business administration and marketing, and then I minored in French. Getting a job out of college was tough for me initially, because I had applied to over 85 jobs, and they all said no. You know, I remember some people would say, they would send me no and I would crawl. And they would hear me, and they'd be like, oh, I didn't know you spoke English, you know, you know, cause of my name.

And I thought, wait, you wait, did you reject me? And I was like, yeah, we thought we, you know, we were looking for English people. And I used to just go through several random things. And I thought, I can tell you, which is my full name is like, well, I don't know that there's a resume that says, you know, I'm competent and all these things.

And so, after 85 plus resignation, I basically begged a previous internship that I was, I was in, you know, I'd intern at a software company and I said, look, I have a year to find a job or I'm off. And I think I did well for you as an intern. And you know, do you have anything to offer? And so, they had a sales position.

And I never even imagined myself being a salesperson, but you know, it's a job. And so, I got it and then I needed to file for the H1B, which is a lottery system in America. And you know, there are only so many given each year and there are many more that apply to it. And so, a number of factors play into that.

And, you know, I wasn't sure I was going to get it, but luckily, I got it. The only thing was I hated the job. And, uh, you know, I was in this position where, you, you go through so much to just get this and then you made it through the lottery. And then you're asking yourself, you're not doing the job you wanted. You got through all this rejection, but at least you should be grateful that you're in the country. And I just remember just feeling like I had lost, you know, because I felt like I had tried, you know, I really tried all these jobs.

And then August 22, 2012, I got into this car accident and that took my life away. And then it was. It was really the turning point. So, I was driving my burgundy Toyota Camry, and I got into this part where the road merges into the highway. And then I was, as I was cruising my lane, my lane gets cut into half and all of a sudden, I'm swerving out of the way, so I don't get hit. And I'm smashing into the left car, one car, two cars, boo, boo, boo.

And you know, I'm 22 at the time. And I think I'm, you know, about to flip over this bridge. Adrenaline runs in and I'm kicking through the door and I'm thinking this is the end and I somehow managed to get out of that car and I was standing in the middle of the highway. There were two other cars hit and for some reason, nothing happened to me, and car was totaled, and I really just took that as a sign.

And so, I quit my job shortly after that. And then You know, you have to have a plan. And so, if you're not a citizen, it's either you get married, you go to school or you find another job. And so, I decided I was going to come down in visa status and then, um, go to school to get my MBA, New York City. It always appealed to me.

I figured I'd make New York City, my campus, you know, I went to Fordham. My MBA and Fordham have this thing where for, you know, Fordham's your school, New York City's your campus. That's the slogan. While I was there, I committed. I would never put myself in a position the way I felt before the accident.

And I felt like I was afraid of failure before the accident. And after that, I was afraid of not achieving my potential. I dusted up some of the old books that I used to write my thoughts in. And, you know, I launched my website. In 2012, I didn't know what I was going to do, but I just figured out I needed to write and tell my story.

And out of writing and telling stories, I found podcasting. And while I was in school, I launched my podcast [As Told by Nomads](#) in 2014 and was doing it in between classes. And for some reason, it really just kept getting in numbers. And I, this was the early days of podcasting. I was covering people that grew up the same way I did.

And then I was just finding my voice. And then eventually when it came time for me to graduate, I just took a leap, and I didn't know what it would be. I just said, I got to figure whatever this thing is out. And so, you know, uh, I just started taking all these odd jobs and trying to do, develop my own frameworks and thoughts because I was starting to get listeners and they were telling me what they liked and what they wanted more of.

And I thought I think my skill set is really being able to be a bridge. Divide and really use my lived experience and, and, you know, to help companies and individuals navigate that. And then eventually I was able to monetize it in a way as a consulting company and speaking engagements and with workshops, but it was, it was a long windy road because I would try different things and sometimes the world wasn't ready for it.

And so, it'll fall, but then something would happen, right. So, something like Trump would get elected, for example, and all of a sudden, I get spikes. Like, you know, everything you're writing about is so important. Or something even worse, right, that would happen would be the murder of another black man. And unfortunately, it would lead to all these things.

And that is simultaneously triggering and then, then it's like, you know, I got to get into action to make sure this doesn't happen again. And so, it was a combination of those factors. And eventually, I developed myself as a thought leader in the space of cultural competency. And then, um, you know, one thing led to another, one of the talks, you know, hit, and then here I am today.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you talk a little bit about diversity, equity, and inclusion and the DEI space and some of the types of work that you do?

**Tayo Rockson:** A lot of the work I do is going into different environments. It could be workplaces, it could be schools, it could be media environments to figure out the problems that are preventing people from being themselves fully, right? This could be on the spectrum of race, you know, sexuality, anything, nationality, any of those things. And gender identity, all these things. And when I explained to people, I did in

his idealist form, it's really about creating a safe space for people to bring as much of themselves as they want to, without experiencing punitive measures, and that looks very different for different people.

And in today's world, there are more people getting access to platforms that amplify their voices. It means that leaders need to be able to understand how to manage and navigate all those spaces. And so, mistakes are inevitable, but what do you do after those mistakes? And then that's, that's my job, right? It's to either fix toxic environments or to help guide how to navigate those terrains. And yeah, you know, that's typically how I describe space to people.

**Matt Bowles:** How do you think about the relationship between the DEI work in the corporate world and the need to dismantle systems of oppression?

**Tayo Rockson:** I think we are at a pivotal time in history, and I think the pandemic highlighted that a lot. And I really sometimes think a lot of people have forgotten. It was a moment when the world stopped. There are very few moments, if any, that have had that particular thing happen. And in that moment, right, there was the heightened fear of just, whoa, what's happening? And then there were, there were moments of unity.

And oftentimes in those moments of unity, it was because people could pause. They didn't have anything to do. And they were just, just watching the same thing. Like, in horror, or either the murder of George Floyd or any of the, like, how, you know, what is, how did we get here? And that is the connection I see with both.

A lot of times in history, you and I, we've just navigated how there are forgotten aspects of history. So, when we don't mirror, we don't add social justice and DEI, what happens is people forget and they shift to the default. If the default is the history you learned in school, which wasn't complete, that means your brain has already accepted that as what is considered safe for you.

And so, you're busy with your day-to-day, you're busy with your parents, your kid, your friend, whatever you're doing. Your brain is already going to work with what it has. You're not adding any information to it for your brain to then be malleable enough to add. And so, your day-to-day is just accepting more toxic things.

And we have such speed of information happening right now. People are creating platforms off, whatever it is, positive things, negative things. And so, whether it's the charisma of someone you like, and you've just naturally gone through that, you're not doing the hard work, which you might've been forced to do during a moment like the pandemic, where you really have to reflect because it was just you and your thoughts and nothing else was happening. And so that's what I battle against, honestly, where you get people to stop, reflect, and critically think through how their presence can harm someone, how their presence can help someone, and how they can ensure that they're not participating in perpetuating a narrative, which is the hardest thing for people to do as they get older.

You know, when you're younger, you're more curious, but for some reason, a lot of us, when we get older, just accept certain truths and we're not willing to unlearn. And to me, they're inextricably linked because I think as the, as fast as the world is moving, many people are not going at that speed to unlearn the toxic elements and to pick up new things and then to create new systems and then to educate about those new systems, about the new information that we're gaining. And so that's the connection I see there.

**Matt Bowles:** What is your assessment of what appears to be a rise in those Neofascist views, a movement toward by an alarming percentage of American society, but also other countries as well, by the way, but a move towards authoritarian white nationalism, a move towards toxic masculinity, a move

towards the bullying of vulnerable groups, whether we're talking about immigrants or transgender people, it seems like there is a move in that direction.

What do you see as some of the reasons why people are susceptible to that or allured by that or moving in that direction? And what are some of the disruptive things that can be done about that?

**Tayo Rockson:** I think it goes back to identity and the fear of loss of identity. I think a lot of people feel like when we bring up all these new things, even though they're not new actually, but what is considered new pieces of information, they feel like you are forcing your ideas on them.

And, the biggest irony for me is that a lot of people who feel that way have had their ideas normalized for the most part, where they haven't had to face, the concept of even any of that being questioned. And I always say, can you imagine how it's been for people who didn't have your lived experience, who had to understand your way of living in order to survive?

Now people have more voices, and they feel more empowered. And you feel this threat to your identity because you feel like the more you share, people will move away from your views. When it should be in both ends, in most cases it's not an either or. Someone getting to express the full versions of themselves is an opportunity to learn and understand something that, you know, has not been shared at all.

As opposed to it being a threat to that. But humans, whenever you feel like your safety is being compromised or your values are being threatened, I mean, we haven't reacted well throughout history. I mean, there are wars on the back of religions in the, you know, factions in the same religion. Protestants, Catholics, Catholicism. Cross-religious, you know, Muslims and Christians. And that idea of people feel like you're telling them how they should be is honestly what I think is at the root of these things. And then my response to that is, wait, who do you want to be? That's what I always tell people. Who do you want to be as a person?

And do you feel like you are the best version of that self? Because if you want to be who you, your best self is, I doubt it would sound like anything you're saying, and I do it on across all the sides here. I just don't think we're doing enough to critically think through what is really threatening an identity and what is expanding an identity.

And I think that's why we're here today. There's a lot of people. That will tell you, you are, what they always say, end woke policies, like the kids are being woke, you're going to turn our kids into this, you're going to turn our kids into that. And I always find examples of things that I grew up with, and I'm like, I didn't turn into, none of, you had stuff that you probably thought was horrible and you found your way to your value, and it had nothing to do with that, right?

And it's just an interesting misunderstanding of how creating safe spaces with people is a threat to the people who are already privileged, in my opinion. Now, there are obviously, that's a nuance, there's obviously nuances here and then there are things we need to figure out how to communicate in moderation and ensure that we're not demonizing an entire side as well.

But I don't, I just don't think people are being honest with themselves about whether, uh, their identities are as threatened as they think it is.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also wonder how much of it is actually a misunderstanding versus how much of it is a perceived material self-interest in maintaining certain structures of power and equality.

And when those structures of power and equality are perceived to be threatened, and there could be a perceived lack of privilege, whether you're talking about heterosexual privileges or male privileges or white privileges or anything else, that there tends to be a visceral response, which is actually oriented towards an effort to maintain those power structures as they are.

**Tayo Rockson:** So, what I would say is, in addition to that, there's also loss of a fear of loss of power and, uh, privilege. And so, privilege comes with power. And when you're so used to having things come with a certain privilege and you see a demographic shift, for example, your fear might be they're coming to take it from me.

So, we must not let them understand. Now that's a very archaic, simplistic way of approaching something. It's not about the table. It doesn't have to be like that you can expand it. And I feel like that's honestly, you hear it in the, in the politicians, right? You need, you say certain phrases that will trigger enough people's value systems that remind them that it's either or then it becomes crabs in the barrel system.

That they don't care about any other things. And I always see this with people that vote against their interests. You know, hey, your pockets, they're going to be less. If you let this person win, if that person comes to your country, you're not going to have your job anymore. Right. All these little things.

And those are the bad actors, in my opinion. Now, the people, most of the people are in the middle though, and I always encourage them, hey, have you critically thought through everything that's being said by this person that you're saying like you're the one that can elect that person. But you can't be so swayed.

Eat whatever side you're on. Again, I lean progressive. I'm just asking everybody to just think, is that really going to happen? Seriously, is that really going to happen? Tell me how that's going to happen. And that's all I see people doing. There's a lot of lazy intellectualisms happening, right? People know the right words, the right buzzwords, and the right things, but they can't really tell you how and why it's really going to break down society.

Because they haven't done the research. They just know what someone said, and why it's there. And then, you know, they'll back it up with certain ideology, and sometimes. And that to me is the most dangerous thing. The decrease in the critical thinking of how we got here, and why we just readily accept certain things that we feel as perceived threats to our power, our privilege, and identity.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I've really appreciated throughout your book and throughout all of your work, how you center the systemic analysis of power inequality and the entrenchment of that. And I did my master's degree in international peace and conflict resolution. And one of the things that I noticed was that when you're looking at international political conflicts, right?

Like, take the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example is a place where I've spent a lot of time. I've done a lot of Palestinian solidarity work over the last 25 years, but I went there for the first time in 1998. I mean, I have been back, but one of the things in studying political conflicts like that, that you notice is that there is first of all, an extreme level of power asymmetry, you have a settler colonial enterprise, where you have one of the top 10 most powerful militaries in the world that has a full nuclear arsenal, literally colonizing a people that have no military and, you know, no state institutions to defend themselves with, right?

That's literally what you have when you look at that. And you look at the apparatus of Israeli apartheid, for example, and you look at the apparatus of settler colonialism. You look at the United States role in

ostensibly being the colonial metropolis, uh, for Israel and so forth. And you observe that and then you look at the peace paradigms that are put forward to address that conflict and who is supporting what types of peace paradigms.

And one of the trends that I noticed is that to the extent that the dominant group is in any conflict, right? That's one example, but you can apply this to any conflict. The high-powered group in any conflict I found has a material self-interest in reframing the conflict away from settler colonial power dynamics, for example, and into an interpersonal conflict of some kind.

It's a religious conflict. It's an interpersonal conflict. We don't get along for this reason for that reason. It's a cultural conflict. The solution and what we should do is have our kids go to a camp together and play together in the summer so they can humanize each other. And then they just come back, and one kid has military occupation forces still in his yard and the other kid doesn't, right?

And the dominant groups typically push a conflict resolution framework or a peace paradigm framework that removes attention from the power asymmetry and reframes the conflict in a way. That equalizes the two parties from a power perspective, thereby taking attention away from the systemic abuses of what's going on.

And we could use all sorts of other examples as well. You look at the police situation in the United States and the state violence is going on right here or any number of other types of examples. And you find that dominant groups will tend to push reframing narratives like that. And then if you look at the nonprofits that work on these issues, the ones that will get the most funding, including from the United States government, in many cases will be, of course, the ones that do exactly that, right?

Especially when the United States is involved as one of the conflict antagonists and part of the conflict, right?

So, I'm curious about your perspective, when you do these different cross-cultural workshops, anti-bias workshops, and all of that other kind of stuff, how do you think about that in conjunction with the need to dismantle oppressive power structures?

**Tayo Rockson:** I think about it all. I mean, as you highlighted, there are several distractions at play, but you can't solve a problem if you're not able to address how you got the problem, why the problem persists and what is continuing to cause the problem. And in our global landscape, there are many masks that people will tell you, oh, it's this and what's, it's really that, but it's this, it is not that, or it's all happening at the same time.

And to me, it's the same way I approach inter-sectionalism, right, which is a way people can look at themselves, right? People are multiple things at once. Many things are happening at the same time when it comes to problems, and many things are happening at the same time when it comes to solutions.

This means that we can't go into one problem, one solution, thinking it has to be one way without being willing to accept that another way might exist. And then when that way exists, being able to have that duplicity, uh, multiplicity rather, of mindset where we can say, okay, for this particular group, this is something we should do.

For that particular group, this is something we should do. And that's how I approach everything. And it's, it's a very long, arduous process, as you can imagine because you run into multiple deadlocks. And it's the

only way it has to be, though. Because human beings are inherently complex. And the problems we've created, however divisive they may be, and simple they may sometimes look like, in solution, they're never easy in application.

I do the same thing. I look at the historical context. I look at the present day, uh, consequences. I look at the modern-day actors and look at, the older actors. And I look at our internal biases that get us there, or even just thought patterns that lead us to create all these systems. And I like to ask questions in my workshops and my consultancy is just why are you doing this?

How did you get here? What is your hope? Right. I use all the, all the, you know, how what, you know, everything. And I really want people to sit down with whatever their role is and how they're participating in that. And I think if you ask the right amount of questions, that can be the difference between saving and ending lives.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. And I think for me, it really comes down to just universal values and principles, right? In that my solidarity work that I do doesn't have to do with allegiance towards any particular ethnic or identity group. It has to do with social justice, regardless of which group in this context is being oppressed and which group is doing the oppressing.

And oftentimes you'll have the same group that in one context. Or in one historical moment is being oppressed and then another historical context or another, you know, place in the world is doing the oppressing. Right. And so, you have those types of complexities that arise. And so, for me, it's just sort of a straightforward matter of political principles.

You know, when I started doing Palestinian solidarity work like 20 years ago, uh, in the context of doing that activism, I got in a relationship with a Palestinian woman. And at the very beginning of that relate, we're having conversations, you know, and all that in the very early stages of that. And one of the questions I said to her was, I am not doing this activist work because I have some type of inherent allegiance to Palestinians as an ethnic group per se.

I am doing this solidarity work because this is the right, just thing to do, given this current power arrangement in the situation that's happening. So, I said, let me ask you this question. If the situation was reversed, and all of a sudden, the Palestinians had, one of the most powerful militaries in the world, and the Israeli Jews had no military, and the Palestinians were occupying and oppressing and abusing and colonizing the Israeli Jews, would you also be out here in the street demonstrating on behalf of the Israeli Jews if the power structure was reversed?

Cause I would be. And she's like, yeah, I would be. And I was like, cool, then we can do this relationship. But that was an important litmus test question, right? Are you doing this because it's 'your group' and it's in your group's self-interest? Or are you doing this out of principle? And obviously for oppressed people, of course, it's both. But the question is in terms of values, are these your values?

And so, for me, that's just kind of like how I approach it and that's how, how I've always looked at situations and how I try to talk to other people about situations is just sort of abstracted out and just look at what are the political principles and values behind it, you know?

**Tayo Rockson:** Yeah, but you know what's also interesting. A lot of times in this work, especially when I speak to anti-racism, and it benefits everyone. That is the thing that I often have. When I'm really angry, I have a hard time, just explaining sometimes it's, if you're doing this, you're helping everyone be better.

Because of the type of pattern, the least of that type of thinking is something that will be filtered out, right? You help someone understand how you're not going to create one standard that others someone, or it makes one better than another. You will help someone think and expand their idea of trying to understand what makes this group feel like they're involved, and this group feels like they're involved.

It helps in your business way, helps as a parent, it helps as whatever you're doing, it will help. That's what I'm always telling people. Yeah, you know, and what you're saying as well, but that's really how you get people to understand how to like, hey, maybe I should question myself, I don't know how did I got this thought? Just because I don't know this person doesn't mean this person is this way. That's better in society.

**Matt Bowles:** What are your thoughts about engagement with people that have, let's just call them regressive views? This is another thing that I think about, right? Because it strikes me that in many cases, it is really not a productive use of time or emotional energy, even for me, let alone my gosh, for someone from an oppressed group to take on the emotional labor of doing that.

But even for me, it doesn't seem to be the best use of my time to engage with somebody if they are already deeply committed to maintaining an oppressive power structure. If they're already deeply committed to that, it seems to me it would be a better use of my time. And this is my political organizer background, a better use of my time to talk to people who are not already committed to maintaining an oppressive power structure.

They may be from the dominant group that could be moved into an organizing, you know, framework or movement to help to dismantle those dominant power structures, as opposed to spending time dialoguing with people that are already committed to maintaining those power structures. But I'm curious about how you think about that, because I know a lot of your work does talk about sort of engaging with interrupting and, you know, the importance of some of that, and especially, for dominant groups, right? To be doing that with other people from dominant groups. And so, I'm curious how you think about that.

**Tayo Rockson:** No, I have my limits, right? Because you have to think about yourself when you're doing a lot of this work and your energy. And I firmly believe that I work in between the extremes.

And I think a lot of people are influenced by extremes to some, to certain degrees. And I find that for a lot of people, my work is focused on a lot of people in the middle. Who might've not critically thought through certain things. And my job is to help them, right? There are people, like you said, who might be far gone another way, and it wouldn't be the right use of my time or energy to even, you know, focus on that.

But there are kids from people, you know, that might adopt a certain mindset. There are people that look like me that might practice something that I feel like, you know, could lead to something that could hurt our community more. And those are people I focus on because I know what it was like for me in my formative years.

And brought up, you know, me glancing and looking at Nelson Mandela and then taking on his ideas and just listening to that. It could be someone else doing something to someone else. And I'm always cognizant of that. I'm the oldest of three young men right now. Right. And so, we always mimic all these things.

And I take all those moments. So, I don't, spend a lot of time like you like you with people that I that are so set in their ways or are even just bad actors. Honestly, that's what I call them bad faith actors rather. You're just committed to just disrupting for their own benefit. Yeah, I don't think it's a successful approach for me. I know this is people that do that

**Matt Bowles:** So, for people that are good faith actors and want to support and do the right thing. I want you to share a little bit about a thing a concept that I've heard you talk about, which is the important distinction between allyship and the savior complex. And how we can best stand in solidarity and support vulnerable communities that are being targeted.

**Tayo Rockson:** So, when I think about allyship and savior complex, I really ask people to think about who they're centering. That's at the core of it. Why are you doing it? Right? Are you doing this to make yourself look good? Or are you doing this because you feel like it will make you look like a savior to a certain community?

And a lot of times, if you really want to be the proper ally or what some people call an accomplice how can you use your privilege to center people who are marginalized and dismantled in the background? So, you center those people. People might not know you did anything, but you did something behind closed doors in the background.

A savior complex could be what you wanted to say like, you know, it was me. People who like to take pictures of themselves go to all these countries with kids that might be malnourished and then put in the pictures on Instagram and like well, why are you putting a picture in Instagram? Are they your kids?

No, I just, but then why did you put the kids right there the optics of that and well I was there, and I donated all these things. You could have done that in the background, or you could have used that moment of education to really work with some system that has participated in and making it harder for people's lives.

And it's really about that one question. Am I centering myself here or am I centering on the right person, or right people rather? And then if you ask yourself that, you'd be able to be the best type of ally you can be.

**Matt Bowles:** Tayo, I also want to talk about your podcast, [As Told by Nomads](#). I am a listener, I am a fan, but for people that have never heard of your show, this is their first introduction to it. What can they expect from the show? What are you up to?

**Tayo Rockson:** So, thank you. I really appreciate that. And the show has been a longstanding show. I, since 2014, and I try to put as much emphasis as I can, cause its sometimes life can get in the way, but it covers change makers, leaders. People from different backgrounds who are committed to sharing new ideas, solving problems, and just being positive members of society.

So, you, you find a lot of authors, a lot of books, a lot of things like we discussed today. Sometimes it's a solo episode for me. But I just, you know, I initially called it [As Told by Nomads](#) because when I started the podcast, I was literally bringing on people that were nomads. And then it quickly evolved into this thing where nomads became just a mindset.

And so how you, you really, um, focus on using your difference to make a difference, like I like to say. And so that's what it is. Just interesting conversations, kind of like what you're hearing today. And hopefully it moves the needle forwards in anybody's, uh, social justice idea or entrepreneurship mindset.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, it's really particularly substantive, which is one of the things that stands out about it for me. And it integrates a lot of these different themes of travel and entrepreneurship with being rooted in social justice, and you bring on fascinating people, really smart, really substantive. So, I am a big fan of the show.

We're definitely going to link that up in [the show notes](#) so that folks can check it out. One of the things I find when I'm hosting the podcast is that I learn a lot from my guests. And I want to ask you, Tayo, just reflecting back on all the people that have been on your show, does anything come to mind or a couple of things come to mind in terms of lessons that you've learned specifically, from your guests?

**Tayo Rockson:** I think I'm often just reminded of the power of our mind. I think, you know, obviously we're all animals, but the thing that separates us is the power of our imagination. I bring all these people who are so smart. They're creating concepts. They're able to see patterns where people don't see patterns.

And it's a humbling moment because it just reminds me of the endless potential that many of us have. And sometimes it makes me sad because I think people have created this idea that we're limited, right? Again, some of these systems, and so that's the prevailing lesson, is like, as humans, we are limitless in our potential and the division of ourselves in the world that we can see is really up to how much we want to expand our minds. And so, I am always learning that lesson with anyone that I bring on the podcast as they share their thought process.

**Matt Bowles:** Well, I also want to put people on to West Africa and Nigeria in particular. I mean, West Africa is a region that has really won my heart. I went for the first time in 2019. I was there for about three months in the region. Spent a month in Lagos and went through the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Senegal. And then I went back, I mean, the pandemic happened. So, then I went back just this past year in 2022 and spent another few months there. And it is just a truly extraordinary, spectacular region.

And I'm ready to plan my next trip to go back again. Could you share a little bit about your recommendations for Nigeria and you know, for folks that want to spend some time there,

**Tayo Rockson:** I mean, I'm a Lagos boy. So, so I'm, I always tell people to go to Lagos. Lagos is thought of Lagos as the New York city, right?

The equivalent, right? They're the, and Abuja is the capital. So, Abuja will be like DC, both cities. One is Tamer and one is, you know, bustling traffic. You know, loud, different cultures, different things. And so, I think even though Lagos can have a very hustle personality, there are parts of Lagos though that you can go, right?

We've got a mainland, we've got an island, right? I was, you know, several islands actually. And you can just, you know, decide the day. I always encourage people to go to, there's a market called Tejuosho. You can go to a local market, but Tejuosho is one of those markets. And the reason I want you to go to the markets is you get to really see people around food.

Sometimes you're haggling for prices, but just really getting food from the source and I don't know why it just always brings a smile to my face because not only is the food delicious, but you're just seeing how people rise in the morning and really go about their day to put food in the mouths of the rest of the city.

And I think that's one of the most humbling things to see just because food is one of the greatest connectors in the world. And then if you're ever able to catch a concert, there are endless musical acts. They come to Nigeria, Ghana, different parts of West Africa around the December period. And if you can catch a ticket, you'll be able to have a good time of your life.

I remember seeing Rick Ross, you know, Lagos was like his first album, and I didn't even know who, you know, who he was at the time, but he was just like, we got tickets. And so, we went to go see it. And that's the type of experience you can always have if you go to Lagos. So, I would encourage you to do that.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. I was in Ghana last year for Detty December where they had the music festivals, and it was Unbelievable. Burn Boy was the headline, but they had all the rest of the folks too. I mean, my whole playlist, everybody showed up there. It was unbelievable. I mean, tens of thousands of people came from all over the world and what was so amazing too. It was like, it was interesting because I've been there in the off season, if you will, like the non-tourist season, which is still unbelievable.

I mean, I was in Accra in July and they're having parties on Labadi beach with 5,000 people and DJs lining the beach. And that's not the tourist season. And people were like, you got to come back in December.

I was like, okay. So, then I came back in December, and it was a different vibe because it was probably 50 percent international, at least I would say, but it was very cool because the DJs knew exactly where everybody was from. And they would shout out Atlanta and New York, but then it was shout out Lagos and they would shout out Johannesburg and like all this stuff.

So, it was a really amazing special time. And for folks that don't know about Nigeria, I mean, this is the Mecca of Sub-Saharan African music, arts, film culture. I mean, they call it Nollywood, the film industry there. I mean, this is really incredibly rich in all of those areas. And oh, another thing that I would put people onto in Lagos is the Nikkei art gallery.

**Tayo Rockson:** Yes. I look at you. You went to the spots there. There you are. There are many things. I mean, look, I'm a very proud Nigerian. So, you're going to hear me say we're number one in every one of those categories. So, but yes, rich in culture, rich in food, rich in just fashion, even, you know, music, movies, art, everything that you can think of.

**Matt Bowles:** It's a super special place, so definitely want to encourage people to check it out.

Tayo, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into the lightning round. When you think back about all of your travels and the impact that it's had on you that we've been talking about today, why do you continue to travel at this point in your life? What does travel mean to you today?

**Tayo Rockson:** Travel to me is about self-discovery. I realize every time I travel that I don't know anything, or I know very little, right? There's always something, even if it's even going back to the same place, going back home for me to Nigeria, it's always picking up on something.

It's always a new build. It's always a new idea. But there are very few things in life that humble you enough for you to really do enough research to see if you need to do this to fit in here or to fit out there or to fight against this and to do that. And it's also just, it's another way for me to expand my mind.

I would like to practice what I preach, and everyone is susceptible to accepting ideas and not. And so, it challenges me, especially when I'm in an uncomfortable situation. So, I love that. And then there's the, you know, exploration aspect of it, which is also fun.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, Tayo, at this point, are you ready to move into the lightning round?

**Tayo Rockson:** Absolutely.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, we're starting off with a banger. Which country has better jollof, Nigeria or Ghana?

**Tayo Rockson:** Every other thing that is not Nigeria is poison, so it's Nigeria. So, yeah.

**Matt Bowles:** Can you explain to people that are not familiar with jollof rice, what it is and why this rivalry is so significant? By the way, before you talk about the rivalry, let me just say that I spent now 3 months in Dakar, Senegal. And Senegal is actually where jollof rice originated. And yet, they don't really participate in the Jollof Wars. They just let Nigeria and Ghana duke it out.

**Tayo Rockson:** Look, they might have been the originators, but we perfected it. So basically, Jollof rice is like a, is a rice dish, right? It includes tomatoes, chilies, onions, different spices. You can add it with meat, plantains. There are different ways to make it, especially, you know, in West Africa, the modifications are there. And we often have this thing called Jollof Wars, which essentially, which country has the best taste in Jollof rice. The loudest people are usually Nigerians and Ghanaians, you know, you'll hear Sierra Leoneans as well.

Um, to your point, uh, you know, Senegalese don't get a lot of credits, but they certainly were, you know, I mean, from the Well-off region and that's where the Jollof comes from. But yeah, I mean, it's a form of rice. It's a rice-based dish. And. That's just really delicious. One of our signature dishes in Nigeria.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, Tayo, what is one book maybe that has significantly impacted you over the years you'd most recommend people should read?

**Tayo Rockson:** [Mastery by Robert Greene](#). And I think it's a, I'm a big learner. I, you know, I like to read, write, and I'm a professor, you know, whenever I can be. And it's just a unique study of how people master things in life and how they learn from afar or directly. And I think it's something that everyone should read.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Who is one person currently alive today that you've never met, that you'd most love to have dinner with? Just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation.

**Tayo Rockson:** Trevor Moore. I follow Trevor Moore. He's a comedian. Um, in case you don't, in the audience, you might not know him, but he was former host of The Daily Show, love his book, Born to Crime. But I've always enjoyed his way of thinking and navigating complex ideas. And so, I think it'd be a fascinating dinner.

**Matt Bowles:** I agree. That would be an amazing dinner. Yeah. All right, Tayo, knowing everything that you know now if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Tayo?

**Tayo Rockson:** Be patient. 18-year-old Tayo was very, you know, very eager and nervous about whether he would be accepted. And so, I'll just tell him to be patient that, you know, you're, you're doing the right things.

You know, whatever mistake you make is going to be a part of your story. And, and just, never let anyone tell your story more than you.

**Matt Bowles:** All right, of all the places that you've now traveled, what are three of your favorite destinations you'd most recommend people should check out?

**Tayo Rockson:** Well, we already brought up Lagos. Lagos is, you know, home for me. It's my hometown. I think Santorini, for sure. And I got to be in Bangkok briefly and I thought it was, I loved it. I got to go back. Those would be the three places.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Tayo, what are your top three bucket list destinations, places you have not yet been highest on your list you'd most love to see?

**Tayo Rockson:** I want to go to Egypt. Do you do it like an entire tour of the country? I wanted to do Singapore or Malaysia and then Australia.

**Matt Bowles:** Awesome. I spent about a year in Cairo. So, when you're ready to plan that trip, definitely pick me up, man.

**Tayo Rockson:** Where have you not been? You've been everywhere.

**Matt Bowles:** I have been traveling the world for a while now, so yeah, man.

**Tayo Rockson:** Oh, Brazil. I should have said Brazil as well. Sorry. Duh, there's another one. But yes.

**Matt Bowles:** I'm going back to Brazil, man. I've been three times and that's usually right at the very top of my list as well. But I'm going in December, man. I'm going to, uh, Salvador de Bahia, where I have not been before.

**Tayo Rockson:** This guy was amazing. This is great.

**Matt Bowles:** So excited, man. All right, brother, we're down to the final two questions, and these are the most important questions of this interview.

**Tayo Rockson:** Okay.

**Matt Bowles:** The first one is that I'm going to ask you to put people on to Afro beats. And to name your top five Afrobeat artists that people can find and start listening to. And maybe as you're putting those together, if that's not a list that rolls right off the top, can you share a little bit about Afrobeat?

Like for me, it was amazing. That was actually the primary impetus for me to go to Nigeria. Like 2018, I had spent time in East Africa, and I was going to clubs in Kampala and Nairobi and stuff. And I was just shazaming all this music, making playlists. And I'm looking at all these people up and the majority of them are from Nigeria. I was like, man, I have got to go to Nigeria. And so, for me, that was like a huge part of it.

But then while I was there, I went to the Fela Kuti shrine, and I was really kind of immersing in like the lineage and the history of Afro beats and how it got to where it is today and stuff.

And it's just a truly spectacular art form. But can you share a little bit just from your perspective about what Afro beats mean to you? And then you can put people on to your top five artists.

**Tayo Rockson:** I mean, Afro beats evolved, right? It was initially Afro beats by Fela, which is, uh, you know, it's a mix of what we call high life and jazz.

And Fela Kuti was just the originator of it. Afro beats have become this umbrella term for music coming out of a lot of West Africa. And, you know, it mixes a lot of sounds like contemporary music. There's just some rap and dance halls, R&B. But it's one of the fastest growing genres of music and the diaspora has really invaded the American airwaves now.

And I'm always really proud because I remember the roots of some of the artists growing up. And I guess that segues into the top five. So, for anyone, the biggest three are you know, I just want to give you the biggest three. If you're just thinking of starting, we have, you know, Burna Boy, which you mentioned, there's Wizkid, and there's Davido, some people call him Davido, Davido, whichever one, he usually goes by both.

So those are like the three biggest Afro beats artists. But I also want to put people on a few other people. There's, there's a lady called Ayra Starr. I really like, I love the sound and I think, you know, she's one you should check out. And then there's Rima. And so that will round out the five for me, but I mean, there's so many. Yeah.

**Matt Bowles:** If you start with those five and make a playlist and you're on Spotify or something, it will start feeding you other artists and you can just discover all sorts of amazingness. So, dive into it and just start listening, and it is just an incredible journey.

All right, Tayo, we've come to the final question of this interview. I am about to ask you to name your top five hip hop emcees of all time. As you know, I was a hip hop DJ back in the nineties,

**Tayo Rockson:** Oh, you are.

**Matt Bowles:** This is always one of my very favorite questions to ask people. And before you name your five, can you share a little bit about what hip hop means to you and why you love it?

**Tayo Rockson:** I love and embrace all forms of black culture. And one of the biggest exports of black culture when, you know, when I was young was just hip hop. Right. You know, we'd listen to Bad Boys music, we'd listen to Biggie Recipes, Pac Recipes, you know, Snoop, all these things, West Coast, East Coast. And I remember, you know, just loving just the different cadences.

Then, you know, you've got the diplomats and you got everyone, you know, with different styles and like, oh, they're the groups and all that. And so, it was always nice seeing how people told stories about their experiences as a poet. You know, I always loved the lyricist the most. So that would, that will be how my list will be populated, but yes, I love to dance as well whenever I can, but the lyricists and the, with my favorites. So, yeah.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Tayo, who are your top five?

**Tayo Rockson:** Oh, gosh. Look, I'm just going to preface this because I know it's going to start some kind of, look, these are just my favorites. Okay? You don't have to like it.

**Matt Bowles:** This is a personal and just to contextualize the question. So, people understand, and I do give this context. This is a personal question. These are the MCs that most impacted you as a person. These are not the most commercially successful or most influential or any of that stuff. This is for Tayo Rockson, who were your favorite five Emcees?

**Tayo Rockson:** Okay. So, I'm going to start off with one that I feel like is underlooked a lot. His name is Lupe Fiasco. I think the coolest album is one of the most impressive bodies of works, concept albums just ever put together. Just, you know, loved everything from the cadence to the flow to the delivery. Just incredible.

I mean, then you got Kendrick Lamar, arguably, you know, my favorite or up there. I just, you know, K-Dot to me is, uh, I think it's an anomaly and in a chameleon with the ability to just go in and out of different styles.

This contemporary Jay Cole, especially in the last few years, just the consistency of his work, and some people might, you know, like to give this guy a lot of crap, but Eminem is undeniable.

I mean, I don't even look, Eminem is an alien to me. I just think even just. I love that he pays respect to the community, but I, the speed of delivery of what he says at times is, it's just, it's interesting. And, um, I think it's, these ones have desired and then Rhapsody is my favorite female emcee.

I think, uh, she's another under looked emcee, but I mean, she's just up there to me. And if you're looking for a Nigerian rapper, there's a guy called M.I, so yeah.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. Amazing. And you saw that Cole is featured on the new Burna Boy album.

**Tayo Rockson:** Of course. I did.

**Matt Bowles:** Which is amazing.

**Tayo Rockson:** Yeah.

**Matt Bowles:** Which is so amazing. As by the way, are RZA and GZA of the Wu-Tang Clan. I mean, it is a spectacular album. So special.

**Tayo Rockson:** Yeah.

**Matt Bowles:** Yeah. All right, Tayo. That's amazing, brother. This conversation has been so special, man. I really appreciate you coming on the show. I want you to let folks know how they can find you, follow you on social media, get your book, and listen to your podcast. How do you want people to come into your world?

**Tayo Rockson:** So, thank you for having me. Really appreciate this, Matt. This has been a great pleasure. And, uh, you can find me anywhere if you type Tayo Rockson, so Google T-A-Y-O-R-O-C-K-S-O-N. My website is [tayorockson.com](http://tayorockson.com), my book is [Use Your Difference to Make a Difference](#), and my podcast is [As Told by Nomads](#).

**Matt Bowles:** We are going to link all of that up in [the show notes](#), so you can just go to one place at [themaverickshow.com](http://themaverickshow.com), go to [the show notes](#) for this episode, and there you're going to find direct links to everything that we've discussed on this episode and all the ways to find and connect with Tayo. Brother, this was absolutely incredible. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

**Tayo Rockson:** My pleasure and duty. Thank you.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. Good night, everybody.