

Margaret Anadu: Hi everyone and welcome to Talks at GS. I'm Margaret Anadu, head of the urban investment group. And it is my absolute honor today to be joined by my dear friend Marcus Samuelsson. Marcus is an award-winning chef, restaurateur, philanthropist, and author. He hosts the PBS series *No Passport Required*. And his latest cookbook is called *The Rise: Black Cooks and the Soul of American Food*. Marcus, thank you for joining us.

Marcus Samuelsson: Thank you for having me. I'm super excited to be here with you.

Margaret Anadu: Let's start with your story because it's remarkable. You were born, as you described in a hut smaller than two tables at Red Rooster. And when you were a baby, you and your sister were stricken with tuberculosis and your mother, unfortunately, passed from the disease. But before her death she took you to a Swedish hospital which would ultimately set you up for adoption by a Swedish family. How did those early moments shape you? How did that kind of set up those early years of your life?

Marcus Samuelsson: It's really a journey of goodness of others, right? Like the nurse in that hospital took us in and set us up for adoption. Luck. The fact that we did survive a pandemic like that. And also, that my parents in Sweden, they couldn't have a baby and they wanted to have two kids. So, it's all of the has random incidents that were happening in our life. And I went from Kassahun Tsegie to Marcus Samuelsson in an eight-hour flight.

So, you know, I think about that with a lot of humility. But it's also-- I can draw from that experience in anything that I do.

Margaret Anadu: And you also credit part of your Swedish family with your original kind of joy and passion around cooking. That you'd spent time in the kitchen with your adaptive grandmother. So, tell us about that and when you knew, like, ooh, I'm good at this.

Marcus Samuelsson: Being in my grandmother's kitchen, it was not just about making the meatballs, so, learning about seafood or foraging, it was also the sense of love that my grandmother gave us, right? And it was fun to be in that kitchen. And you know, I don't think it was until I was a teenager that I was like, wow, I have a skill set here that not a lot of people

have.

But you know, I also got a chance to travel very early. I left to Japan when I was 18 years old. And what a great experience to be in a Japanese kitchen as a Black Swede with no Japanese communication skills. And just how can I communicate? How can I learn?

So, my parents constantly put me in situations where I had to evolve, and I had to work on my emotional intelligence and my social intelligence.

Margaret Anadu: Everyone, of course, knows about your very tremendous success at Aquavit. Maybe what people don't know is that, you know, you got on the job. You're navigating the New York culinary scene. And your boss basically dies and you're in charge. How did that shape things for you? What was it like just taking on all of that responsibility so early and unexpectedly?

Marcus Samuelsson: I was both terrified, but also knew-- I would say, Margaret, like the blessings of being Black and an immigrant, having those two experiences shape your life, you realize right then and there that your choices are very different. Right? And when you come as an immigrant, you also come completely on your own very often. So, my support system was the chefs. It wasn't-- I didn't have my uncles here. I didn't have my aunties here. So, your decision making is just very, very different.

But I learned a lot. I grew up in New York during that time. I learned about managing the restaurant, not just cooking. So, I feel very grateful to that experience. And it shaped me, and it made me the person I am today. You know? And we had a tremendous success, you know, getting three stars from the *Times*. And it showed also about work ethic. You know?

Margaret Anadu: And sort of just really building off that success with the three stars, you become a partner in the business, and you start opening restaurants around the world. Even prior to Red Rooster. What did you take away from the ones that did really well? And then, of course, you know, there were some that didn't do so well, so how did those lessons shape you?

Marcus Samuelsson: I realized that narrative and brand very early was important. But we were kind of like the pre-internet to food, in a way. I feel like internet and food really met when the iPhone started in 2006/2007. Right? Before that there was,

of course, internet. And there was, of course, food and branding. But they weren't merged as one until, I mean, Facebook in 2005, but really with the launch of the iPhone the restaurant experience changed completely. But once 2006/2007, you know, there are different gatekeepers. The internet changed everything.

So, I think some of our business was premature for that growth that we wanted to do. And also, a true minority cuisine. I know Swedish people don't think about themselves as minorities, but they're true minorities because it's a small country. So, traveling with Swedish food around the world into Japan, to London, to these places is very much-- you know, it's really a minority journey versus traveling with a cuisine that is much-- with Italian, or Spanish, or French, you know? So, I learned to challenge that. I learned to work towards that. But it was also-- I learned a lot, you know?

Margaret Anadu: And what specifically in those learnings, or what do you think some of the biggest lessons were that really kind of gave you that push, "okay, I'm going to go out on my own. I'm going to open Red Rooster"? What were some of those big inspirations?

Marcus Samuelsson: I feel like there was a connectivity around food that I was always excited about that I know that I could pull up in any city, whether that was Tokyo, London, New York, Stockholm, and add value and create great food and communicate that passion, that narrative. But I think around 2006/07, I started to realize that being a Black chef, what does it mean to be Black in this hospitality industry? What does it mean to always be the only one in the room, which I know you have experience, many experiences of as well from the business side? And you start to ask yourself, what are your responsibilities around that?

So, I knew that I wanted to create something in the Black space that had the narrative of African American, a history and culture behind it. And creating really unique experiences that was not just around food but was around all the pillars of how we engage. Around music. Around culture. Around hospitality. And of course, food. So, that there, those were really the years where I shaped Red Rooster. And then once you've narrowed that down, Harlem is the capital for Black culture, it became pretty clear to me that I had to move to Harlem. I had to experience it from in Harlem and of Harlem. So, it was a true, authentic journey.

Margaret Anadu: And there is also just, I mean, dozens and dozens of amazing chefs in Harlem who don't necessarily get the limelight. And some of them actually are in relative obscurity. What do you think about that? And should we be working to change that?

Marcus Samuelsson: Yeah, I mean there are many ways. And I feel like just as, you know, Goldman has responsibility to work with native and local banks and you have this broad umbrella, as a leading chef, as a leading Black chef I have this broad umbrella too, right, where I know Black food thrives today all over the country. And my job is to highlight it, point at it, challenge media to look at it, write about it so the general population can find Black food as simple as we can find Italian food in any neighborhood in America, not just in New York or Detroit or in Oakland or in Atlanta. And that takes time because, obviously, media in food was never-- you know, media was extremely biased. It was not enough Black writers and people. The whole value proposition of food has always been written from French food, right? And maybe Italian food, and eventually Japanese food, and so on. But never from the Black diaspora.

So, I knew this. And I wanted to-- I wrote a book about it in *Soul of a New Cuisine* in the mid 2000s. And then opening Red Rooster. And then eventually writing, *Yes, Chef*, that you can explain one chef's journey. And then adding to *The Red Rooster Cookbook*. And then creating the food festival, Harlem Eat Up. All of those experiences, there is, you know, led up to *The Rise*. So, whether you are a professional looking into this industry saying, "Hey, here is people that look like me. There is a value proposition here that makes sense." Or you're just a consumer, right? Because if you don't have the right authorship, you can't set up the right memories. Right? And therefore, you can't build the right aspiration. So, it's very important that we have a visible journey now and we have an ownership journey and starting, which just started actually yesterday, our fund, Black Business Matters, matching fund. Right? We partner with Uber Eats. And this a fund that truly drives traffic and revenue towards Black businesses. Because we know in COVID Black and brown communities have been hit much, much harder, both in terms of infection, but also in terms of deaths to this, you know, to COVID.

Margaret Anadu: I want to read something in your book that I loved. Hold on. So, you write "Black food is not monolithic. It's complex, diverse, and delicious. Stemming from shared

experiences as well as incredible creativity." Do you think people are starting to realize that? Like what inning are we in on Black food? Everyone gets it? Understands it? Knows where to go? Or do you think we're still just really scratching the surface?

Marcus Samuelsson: We're in the beginning of it because Blackness is vast and is highly layered and complex, right? But think about it, first of all, our food is America's food. So, let's take some pride and ownership in that. Right? The way the people on this Zoom, the way someone can define the difference between a northern Italian restaurant and a southern Italian restaurant. The way people have had experience between Spanish food or food from Marseilles, for example. Right? These are all things that we take for granted.

But when it comes to Blackness, the fact that we have to talk about that it's not monolithic, but I do know one thing. Americans are very curious when it comes to food. We want to constantly learn new things. COVID has really taught us that we want to become better chefs and more engaged. So, I feel very optimistic about it. But it's about creating the platform and the conversations around it so people easily can access it, whether it's online, supermarkets, restaurants, et cetera. And understand it.

Margaret Anadu: What do you think a story about Black food and Black cuisine, how do you tie that to this broader conversation we're already having in society today around just racial equality generally?

Marcus Samuelsson: So, it's all about storytelling. Lots of it. Right? Even disagreeing. "I don't like this, or I like this." Then the second part is making it, the experience that we're going to have when my staff in Miami is making Suya, you know, this incredible Nigerian, northern Nigerian, exactly, peanut sauce that is incredible street food that you have to listen to Burna Boy and WizKid to experience truly, right? But you know, when that is happening--

Margaret Anadu: Or they could just come to my house.

Marcus Samuelsson: Yeah. But when that's happening in Miami, I feel like we're going places, right? When people can talk about, you know, a Haitian griot dish the way we can talk about orecchiette or tortellini, now we actually come places. So, we obviously have lots of room to improve on that. But the only way

we can do it is through content, through books, magazines, and for me, for example, I work a lot-- I mean, I work with Condé Nast. So, for me to have someone like Dawn Davis, an incredible African American woman as leadership, that changed now the projectory of the content that BA will do for a long time. Right? So, getting positions in leadership, creating content, creating young, new talent, and also acknowledging the past. All of that. So, it's multiple work that has to happen at the same time.

Margaret Anadu: You know, I think at a certain point all of your restaurants around the world were closed. But you were able to partner with the World Food Kitchen and sort of turn them into community kitchens. Talk a little bit about that because I think it's one of the best examples of dealing with, obviously, a very difficult moment, but finding a way to kind of rise up and pull together.

Marcus Samuelsson: Yeah. I mean, March 15th, I think there were two things that happened that day. I realized that, you know, at that point, March 10th, we were in eight countries. We were building in two more countries. We were about 2,500 people working with and for the Marcus Samuelsson Group in an extremely diverse environment, between Finland looks different than Bermuda, for example. And Montreal is completely different than Miami. We had to stop everything. And then said, you know what, we have to convert Red Rooster New York from a restaurant to a community kitchen. And we partnered with José Andrés and World Central Kitchen and we served 225,000 meals between March 15th and October 15th. The same thing happened in Newark and we partnered with Audible and Don Katz to build Newark Working Kitchen, same thing in Miami.

So, that stop also allowed me to realize, you know, what does it mean to be a restaurant during a pandemic? The word restaurant means to restore your community. So, I learned a lot and we learned a lot. And the staff at Red Rooster and all of its outposts, you know, those are my heroes. So, we went from being restaurant workers to first responders.

And I think, in a different way, it was the most important year we ever could have lived together, right, at Red Rooster.

Margaret Anadu: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

Marcus Samuelsson: For me, I would go back to two experiences.

Miss Leah Chase, an iconic restaurateur and chef in New Orleans, she just died last year at 96 years old. She always-- into her nineties, just like, "Marcus, keeping aiming high. Keep aiming high." And she lived such an extraordinary life. But also, even from my father, Swedish father. He was very passionate. He was a geologist. And he always pushed me towards "Do something that you love." You know? Like he loved being a geologist and working with the world. And he always pushed me. It's like he didn't know anything about cooking. But he was like, "If you love that, just go for it and go hard. And, you know, make it your own." You know?

Margaret Anadu: I love that. Thank you for sharing that with us. And thank you for spending time with us today.

Marcus Samuelsson: Thank you so much for having me.

Margaret Anadu: Bye. Thanks everyone.

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