



# Tiffany Ford: From the Community and For the Community

Black on the Ballot  
Episode 3 Transcript

**[Music]**

**Tiffany Ford:** I learned to be friendly with everyone.

To be honest, I didn't choose a side, and I realized that the only way that you can get things done is by being aligned or being friendly to everyone, not just one group of folks.

**Nana aba Duncan:** That's Tiffany Ford. She's a former school board trustee in Toronto...and she didn't go into "party politics." There was really just ONE thing driving her to go out and knock on doors for votes.

**Tiffany Ford:** It's like myself wanting to make changes in my community. And because I'm not aligned with anyone, I need to have enough numbers, right? So, the only way I can have enough numbers is if, you know, I'm cool with a number of people.

**[Music]**

**Nana aba Duncan:** I'm Nana aba Duncan and you're listening to *Black on the Ballot*. Today, I'm asking: What does it mean to be a politician if it's not about taking sides?

Tiffany Ford became a school board trustee in 2014 and ran for city council in Toronto in 2018. For her, political life is NOT about political parties. It's about serving her community.

That community is Jane and Finch, it's a high-density neighborhood in the Northwest corner of Toronto, and it's a true cultural meeting place. People there are from all over the world – they're from across the Caribbean, Vietnam, Iraq, and Nigeria. Thirty percent of its residents identify as Black, which is three times higher than the whole city of Toronto.

On average, there are lower rates of home ownership and higher rates of poverty. Media coverage of the neighborhood is usually about crime or something negative.

That stigma doesn't allow for the very real stories of joy, resilience, success and the community that exists there.

Tiffany Ford would know. She has lived, worked and advocated for the neighborhood her whole life.

In 2024, Carleton University and Operation Black Vote Canada interviewed Black Canadians who had run for and served in elected office.

A lot of them shared that they were motivated to run for office because of first-hand experiences with marginalization or things they saw happening in the Black community. They were shaped by conversations they had around their dinner tables growing up, their parents' own struggles to immigrate and resettle in Canada, and a desire to make change for future generations.

That fits Tiffany's story to a "t." When Tiffany served as school trustee, her political ambitions were focused on making her home better for friends, family, and neighbors.

So, we decided to visit her in her community...

*[Music]*

**Tiffany Ford:** Thank you for coming.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Thank you!

We met Tiffany in a community center called PEACH. It's a converted warehouse painted in bright peach, purples, and greens. The colors match Tiffany's high-top sneakers.

**Tiffany Ford:** I am the current interim executive director at Promoting Education and Community Health, which is PEACH, an organization that's been around for over 35 years in the Jane and Finch community....it's over 4,000 square feet. It is a phenomenal space. It's now a community hub, a place where people can feel safe. It's in what we consider neutral territory.

**Nana aba Duncan:** When Tiffany says "neutral," she means free of gang or group affiliations.

**Tiffany Ford:** Anyone from any different communities or pockets of community of the Jane and Finch community can come here. So we service children all the way to seniors, and it's just some phenomenal space.

**Nana aba Duncan:** It IS an impressive space. It reminded me of the community centers I went to when I was growing up. There was space for people to meet, a lounge area ... Tiffany

showed us a computer room for youth, and then farther in they ran a food program out of well-stocked pantry and kitchenette.

**Tiffany Ford:** Jane and Finch is my home. It's been my forever home. It's the place that has cultivated me, and I've also had all of my career experiences in this community. So Jane and Finch is the place that I'm probably most passionate about.

And it probably is the place that continues to drive me and motivate me.

**Nana aba Duncan:** What was your upbringing like, where did you live?

**Tiffany Ford:** So, I lived at 5 Needle Firway which is a Toronto community housing building

**Nana aba Duncan:** Who did you grow up with?

**Tiffany Ford:** So, my mom is a woman from Grenada, the island of Grenada. She came here when she was 21 years old. During the 70s when a lot of Caribbean women would come and be nannies.

And then she was able to get a PSW, or they called it healthcare aid. For 40, no 39, years my mom worked in that nursing home.

**Nana aba Duncan:** How do you think this shaped you?

**Tiffany Ford:** Oh, it definitely shaped me. When I went to York University, I ended up doing a double major in communications and sociology.

And I learned so much about messaging and about resonating with people and most importantly, I also learned about, you know, social constructs. I took a lot of African history electives and Caribbean history electives. And for me, it taught me a lot more about myself and the fact that, you know, you're kind of this, you know, a product of your society, right?

You may live in social housing. You may live in a community, a community that's considered or more marginalized and stigmatized. But all of these things are, you know, socially constructed and there are barriers that are there, but you can also navigate those barriers.

So, for me, I was really, really keen on focusing on how to navigate those, those barriers and how to influence others and my, you know, my, my peers, my family about the fact that they don't have to, fold into those molds that people have of us.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So, I see that you're, you're learning about yourself in this stage, but what was it about that that made you want to think about other people and serve your community?

**Tiffany Ford:** That's the joy in my life to be honest to see tangible changes in people's lives. Knowing that I can impact someone's life where they're actually happier or there's an actual feeling of, you know, joy. That's actually what brings me the most joy in my life.

**Nana aba Duncan:** And how did this move into running for school board trustee?

**Tiffany Ford:** Yeah, that was like a big fluke, to be honest. And I think it was seeing the opportunity... well, first of all, I remember meeting my school board trustee who was a Black woman, at grade five in my graduation and just remembering her as a Black woman, you know, with authority.

And I didn't know what a school board trustee was, but I knew that she was important enough to give me my, you know, my diploma or whatever it was in grade five. And then remembering never seeing her again until I actually took her position.

So, it was remembering going to Westview, going to the school and learning that it's actually considered the worst school, the worst secondary school in all of Toronto District School Board on the Learning Opportunity Index. And knowing that we've always felt that way.

And just to know that I was considered the worst school, I wanted to make changes.

I also played sports and everything and, having family just kind of watching me standing up or sitting on a dirt without like bleachers, all of those things I wanted to change and was able to change when I became a school board trustee. So, the reason why I wanted to run was just to make the changes, really, to the schools.

And I was really thinking about my high school. And how it felt to go there.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So, you wanted to make changes at that school

**Tiffany Ford:** I wanted to make changes at that school. So that was my focus.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So now you're, you're deciding, you make this decision. And now you have to campaign. So, what was the campaign trail like?

Can you describe that?

**Tiffany Ford:** Yeah, so I didn't, I knew that you had to campaign, but I didn't really realize how political it was. So, because I decided to have a marketing company, it was a PR marketing company right out of university, because I had way too much anxiety to, to look for jobs. The stigma is real, like thinking about your, you know, the, applications and where you live living in Toronto housing.

I did not want to go through that to be honest with you.

I had that PR company for 10 years. And I just was kind of hustling for 10 years. I used creativity and learned to do things by myself, like learn to create flyers, learn to create websites, learned about marketing, learned about strategy, learned about networking, learned about so many different things.

And all of that was useful in creating a campaign.

I started on my own. I did it all by myself.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So, no one taught you anything?

**Tiffany Ford:** No.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Did you ask for help?

**Tiffany Ford:** No. I asked, the only help I asked for was financial help.

And so, I created my flyers. I knew my community. And I, you know, created flyers for different folks. Not all flyers were the same.

Yeah, some were for the Vietnamese community, some were for the folks that were Indian. I also knew my community. I decided when I had my face and when I didn't have my picture on my campaign. So, there's so many things that, you know, there's so many different ways that I strategize, but the most important thing that I did was knocked on every single door, even by myself.

**Nana aba Duncan:** And what was that like?

**Tiffany Ford:** It was great. It was great to realize that you don't really know your community until you knock on every single door to see who's there living as a neighbor, you know, so I was able to knock every single door and, you know, resonated with them about, voting for me, and nobody knew what a trustee was.

That's like probably the most important thing. It was more about if you vote, there's also trustee when you're voting for mayor and city councilor, and I'm like, also there. So, just look for Ford. So, it really depended on who opened that door.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So how did you change your tactics depending on the person you saw?

**Tiffany Ford:** I just changed it. It's not even a thought. It was just something I've learned as someone who had a business that no one knew about that started from the ground up in my, you know, bedroom in Toronto Community Housing, like, it's just a tactic that I've learned.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Can you give an example?

**Tiffany Ford:** Okay. Yeah, let's see Yeah, so as a Black woman knowing that you are working with predominantly males It's easy to speak their lingo like easy to speak a language that they might understand I play golf, right?

I've learned it where I could be at a door speaking to an Asian man who doesn't speak English. I've learned the word vote in Vietnamese.

I've learned about word vote in like Italian. Like I had to find those words, learn it, like 'vote poor me,' I just had a bunch of tools in my back pocket where I can do that, but most importantly I was knocking on the doors.

I was running against a multi-millionaire. Someone who was actually in the newspaper as like some big fish, they call them a big fish versus the small fishes, right? And they had a lot of money.

So yeah, so I had to learn how to deal with those big fishes and the men that were running for the school board trustee position. When I won by a landslide with my \$5,000 versus a huge campaign, I was happy.

I thought, great, I can fix the schools.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Tiffany Ford, as you may have noticed, is not your typical politician. As a school board trustee, she was focused on getting things done, but she noticed that other trustees were approaching the job in a different way.

School board trustees don't generally campaign on or advertise their political affiliations. If you look up how to become a school board trustee in Ontario, where Tiffany is from, you won't find anything about political parties. But that doesn't mean parties don't shape what happens.

Many parties see school boards as a springboard to other levels of office. A training ground for federal or provincial office where party politics dominate.

In that climate, trustees, especially those with ambitions for higher office, are going to consider who is on whose team.

In Tiffany's case, this dynamic translated into feeling pressure to align with political parties and their interests.

**Nana aba Duncan** So you're doing your work, and you're learning that the people around you are attached to different parties and you're seeing this as political. What do you mean when you say political?

**Tiffany Ford:** Yeah, like people are actually like card carrying like political party members and they are aligned. And so, when they vote for motion, or what have you, they vote collectively, or they work together so people like me are just kind of on a sideline like okay.... I just came in.

I thought, you know, everyone was it was actually a time where we had a fresh new slate of trustees, but they came in like prepared and ready. And I'm just like, oh, I didn't know it was like this. I thought it was like, just helping your school.

**Nana aba Duncan** What were some of the issues you wanted to tackle that others had not been addressing.

**Tiffany Ford:** For me, I want to focus on things that I know are actually impacting us. And I think most of my – all of my motions were focused on Black people.

If it wasn't about, Latin American month instead of Hispanic heritage, focusing on, Afro Latin folks or Latinx people, or Somali heritage month or Islamic heritage month, or focusing on, you know, suspensions and expulsions, hearings. Being the first Black chair of the disciplinary hearing, you know, being there because, like, literally 90 percent of students with my own eyes were Black, and then you have all of these old white retirees sitting there saying, "Oh, let's expel that kid from this school, to give them a fresh start."

That is not giving them a fresh start, not realizing the severeness of what they're doing. So yeah.

I didn't know it was political. I thought, great, I can fix the schools. I was just here. Like, the only person, first of all the only Black female, secondly young, thirdly, the only one who went to the schools that I represent.

I thought it was unfortunate.

So, I realized afterwards it was more of a like a stepping stone situation or stepping stone f another political position. Or it's a way where political parties get into the school board system.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So, what did you make of that when you learned all of this?

**Tiffany Ford:** I thought it was sad. I thought it was sad I thought whoa this system sucks. Like we need more people like me. And it's just really unfortunate that it's not like that.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So, let's talk about this system. Historically, Black people - were formally excluded from political life. Despite the barriers, they have run for – and won – elected office for more than 150 years.

But running for office isn't the only way to be political and when you break down the information, based on race, it gets interesting. Data from Statistics Canada show that 70% of Black Canadians engage in political activities, not elected activities but things like signing petitions, going to demonstrations, or speaking out at public meetings. Black Canadians' rate of political activity is the highest of any racially marginalized group in this country.

That same study from Statistics Canada also showed that 64% of Black Canadians participate in at least one community group or association, again the highest of any racially marginalized group.

So far, Tiffany has told us a lot about her drive and ambition to serve her community, and to change and improve the schools she went to. When Carleton University and Operation Black Vote Canada surveyed Black Canadians who had run for office, 60% of those who ran for school board said their reason for running was to represent communities without a voice.

Tiffany isn't unusual – she is right on trend. It should have been enough for Tiffany to just want to get in there and get things done for her community...but politics doesn't always work that way.

**Tiffany Ford:** I learned to be friendly with everyone. To be honest, I didn't choose a side and I realized that the only way that you can get things done is by being aligned or being friendly to everyone, not just one group of folks.

Because to me, it was a bunch of people versus each other, but then it's like myself wanting to make changes in my community and because I'm not aligned with anyone, I need to have enough numbers right, so the only way I can have enough numbers is if I'm cool with a number of people.

**Nana aba Duncan:** What were the changes you wanted to make that *couldn't* be done on the trustee level?

**Tiffany Ford:** Well, in my community, the Jane and Finch community, I just thought about all the stigma and all the issues.

Poverty. Stigma, feeling marginalized, changing the, like, the image of the community, changing the way that young people felt in their community, changing the attitudes towards the community, empowering others in our community to also want to make changes.

I felt like none of our leaders were able to do that because they've been around forever, and they also were folks that didn't really reflect what the community looks like.

And the only way you can potentially make change is being a city councilor. So that's what I thought about.

**[Music]**

**Nana aba Duncan:** As a Black woman taking a run at municipal politics, Tiffany did not have the odds in her favor.

Research from the Canadian Municipal Barometer and Samara Centre for Democracy - shows that municipal politics is overwhelmingly older, white and male.

On average, 7 out of 10 municipal politicians are men. 7 out of 10 are over the age of 50. Nine out of 10 are white.

By the time Tiffany was ready to run for Toronto city council in 2018, she had spent her whole life witnessing how her community was being treated by elected officials. And it wasn't good. It was in 2018, when the city councilor representing her neighborhood, Giorgio Mammoliti, was asked by Rebel Media about quote unquote "thugs" in community housing. This is what he said:

**[News clip]:** "I see it like spraying down a building full of cockroaches, the cockroaches are just going to scatter. So, start evicting them, let them scatter because their particular strength is when they are all together in a community like Jane and Finch. So, my approach is going to be scatter them evict them get them out of Jane and Finch completely... I think we need to knock the buildings down completely..."

[https://x.com/pressprogress/status/1029150034980495361?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1029150034980495361%7Ctwgr%5Eb51dc500c5ce51455d0ce440ba6669227e101f39%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_c10&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpressprogress.ca%2F12-times-giorgio-mammoliti-proved-hes-the-most-embarrassing-city-councillor-in-toronto%2F](https://x.com/pressprogress/status/1029150034980495361?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1029150034980495361%7Ctwgr%5Eb51dc500c5ce51455d0ce440ba6669227e101f39%7Ctwcon%5Es1_c10&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpressprogress.ca%2F12-times-giorgio-mammoliti-proved-hes-the-most-embarrassing-city-councillor-in-toronto%2F)

**Nana aba Duncan:** You decide to move from school board trustee to a run for city council. Why?

**Tiffany Ford:** Giorgio Mammoliti. Period. If we had a city councilor that was doing the work and not dividing our community, I wouldn't care about becoming a city councilor because it's not about me running for anything or becoming this, you know, politician. I didn't care about that. I only cared about changes.

And when you have, you know, someone who's calling you cockroaches or, you know, it's just blatantly racist.

How in the world are you going to be fighting for us? You're not, right?

**Nana aba Duncan:** What was your first thought when you heard the councilor call some of the people living at Jane and Finch cockroaches?

**Tiffany Ford:** I, well, obviously he was calling me a cockroach too because I'm, was coming, I'm, you know, living in Toronto housing, even as a school board trustee, I lived there, you know, and for me, you can leave and it was a thought, but I personally wanted to stay because I wanted to show people you can live and be in the community and also make changes.

It definitely made me want to, first of all, call it out. And then secondly, empower others to vote.

**Nana aba Duncan:** I want to talk about campaigning to be a councilor. So, by this time, you've already campaigned before to be a school board trustee, school board trustee, and you succeeded. So this time around, what were the challenges that you faced?

**Tiffany Ford:** The challenge was not doing everything by myself. Compared to what I did the last time and being able to find trustworthy people to help me and I didn't have a problem making money which was great because a lot of people wanted Giorgio Mammoliti out.

So, we made the maximum amount of money probably over online like twitter or something like that, at the end of it I had over 600 donors, which is a lot of people. You know social media and all that stuff was consistent.

It was great. I still made my own strategies. I still even created some of my own things. Because I just felt like I knew what I wanted. I came up with the slogan "Together, We Can." I came up with the marketing.

I really did. And I had a lot of people volunteering, which was great. And so, some of the challenges was really more of the things I couldn't control.

Like, you know, Doug Ford changing the game on us like a month before the election.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Okay, I'm gonna cut in for a second to give you some context. In 2018, aspiring city councilors in Toronto were already in campaign mode, when Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced he would slash the number of Toronto City Councilors almost in half, from 47 to 25.

Could he do this? That was the big question.

He argued that it would save the city money, and it would streamline decision-making on city council. The city of Toronto argued that the change would cause, I quote "disruption and confusion for candidates and voters" but Ford's plan went ahead. New ward boundaries were drawn, some wards were eliminated, and Candidates had to reassess their campaign - Some had to decide if it made sense for them to run at all.

**Tiffany Ford:** You know, Doug Ford changing the game on us like a month before the election. So, you know, fighting not just one incumbent like Giorgio Mammoliti, but then also another one.

And then, of course, Giorgio Mammoliti just being fiercely racist, like, overtly racist, saying so many things, talking about how he can do more for Black people than our Black candidates, you know.

.....It was a lot. It was a lot.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Working your way through that must have been difficult. Did you face any other issues during your campaigning – specifically campaigning as a Black woman.

**Tiffany Ford:** Always. I mean just being a Black woman with my name Tiffany Ford, number one people didn't really think that I was Black until I showed up at their door some people maybe the Black people did but some other people didn't realize that I was Black, right?

**Nana aba Duncan:** ...Did they say that to you?

**Tiffany Ford:** Absolutely. They were very frank about it. They're like, oh, I didn't know you're Black. Yeah, I'm Black then they'd be like, oh, you know, the funny thing is are you related to Doug or Rob Ford.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Rob Ford was Toronto's mayor from 2010-2014. His older brother Doug became premier of Ontario in 2018. Those Fords aren't Black, they're white.

**Tiffany Ford:** You know they just didn't understand my last name and, and the connection with Blackness.

So, depending on who I was talking to, I'm like... 'its a slave name.' If you want to really get down to it, you know, so I felt like I was having lots and lots of different conversations with people. And yeah, even mentioning slavery and talking about that. So, that was interesting.

**[Music]**

**Nana aba Duncan:** Black candidates – especially Black women – have to think strategically about how they present themselves. Women politicians' bodies and appearances are judged and scrutinized in the media and by the public more than the men. For Black women in politics, that includes judgments about their clothing, their skin tone (as in the closer to white, the better) and their hair style...

**Tiffany Ford:** My hair was usually straight, meaning flat ironed, not chemical, but like, straight for pictures. And depending on when I'm campaigning, sweating, whatever, maybe it's curly. It depends, right? Sometimes it's straight, sometimes it's curly because that's how I wear my hair.

**Nana aba Duncan:** And was there a different treatment, do you think? Were you treated differently depending on how your hair was done?

**Tiffany Ford:** Yeah, I would say so. I felt like, straight hair was more, what's the word? Not friendly, but kind of like, not appeasing. What's the word for it? I'm trying to think of the word, but it was more,

**Nana aba Duncan:** Acceptable?

**Tiffany Ford:** Acceptable, yeah, or more non-confrontational or no, that's not the word.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Professional?

**Tiffany Ford:** Maybe, I've heard professional multiple times, yeah.

It's something I've learned as well even in business to be honest, right? You're, you're you can be more liked with the straighter hair flowing and then when your hair is in a bun or in its natural, curly state, it's like, different.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Was there any other discrimination that you noticed?

**Tiffany Ford:** Being a female, for sure. Oh, I'm going to vote for you because you're so pretty. Or, you know, always the, are you single? Do you have children? Are you married? When are you having children?

What does your man think about this? What is it like or the non, you know, not taking me seriously? Oh, you're so much younger or like, you know, it's just a constant kind of preparation when you're about to knock on the door and depending on the community that you're going to knock on the door, you kind of have to prepare yourself mentally and emotionally because it's so draining.

So that was also another major hurdle in the community. There was a lot of like, oh, why should I vote?

It's gonna be the same people or why should I vote? It's like, you know, they don't do nothing for us Anyways, so why should I vote like just very like.

**Nana aba Duncan:** And what was your answer to that?

**Tiffany Ford:** Why you should vote? Depending on where they live I can talk about the different issues that are happening, right? Could be like, you know, they're going to bring more condos here, right like or you know, the LRT was a big deal, right?

It's not finished yet, but having the LRT here, you know who brought it here, right

Some of the things that I've noticed is a lot of seniors being lonely, you know, and doing things for people, even though I was campaigning, like, you know, helping people, getting groceries, like, little things like that. For me, it wasn't about them voting for me.

It was more, like, it sucks that no one's knocking at your door like the actual candidate to see the issues that you're going through because a lot of people just needed someone to talk to and they never had anyone who knocked on their door and was interested in listening to them.

And so, even as a school board trustee, you know sort of transitioning. I was still a school board trustee, right? And I'm running, being able to just talk about the school system or things that they needed help with. That was a good thing. I knew a lot about the school system for people who needed help with that so sometimes when I was knocking on the door, they had a whole list of issues that they needed help with and I would really, really talk about that.

**Nana aba Duncan:** And with the Black folks that you saw at the door when you were door knocking, did you feel supported by them?

**Tiffany Ford:** Overall, yes.

**Nana aba Duncan:** What do you mean by overall?

**Tiffany Ford:** Overall, yes, because I mean, to be honest, if someone knocked on my door, and I wasn't running, like just, just in general, I may feel like, girl, you ain't gonna win.

You're Black, you know, Mammoliti's there forever. Like why, why are you even doing this to yourself?

**Nana aba Duncan:** Is that like the energy that they gave?

**Tiffany Ford:** Some people for sure, you know, you're Black.

**Nana aba Duncan:** And they said that too?

**Tiffany Ford:** Some people. I had one guy who, to this day – and it's, it's weird, I just recently saw him – who told me to, to drop out of the race.

My first campaign, he told me drop out of the race. He's a Black man, from our community. And if I listened to him, I wouldn't have been anywhere, you know, and basically wanted me to give it to, you know, a non-Black person, a male.

And I'm just like, for what? Why? I thought you were, you know, pro-Black. I thought you were like, interested in like getting our community changed.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Do you think that Black community members should support Black people who are running?

**Tiffany Ford:** Absolutely. We always should. But sometimes we can't be blind as well. Like it can't just be because someone's Black, to be honest, it has to be some someone who's willing to do the work, someone who's passionate, someone who's like, you know, might have the background of proving themselves to be, you know, someone who is not just capable, but trustworthy, and someone who's willing to push Black people along, or also support others.

And I know financially, I got more support outside of my community. I mean, I had friends I couldn't even rely on to knock on doors with me. So no, you should not expect that at all. It'd be nice to expect it.

But I think you just have to really think about what you're doing this for and realize not everyone's gonna support you like you just have to really be hone into what your goal is and

realize it's, it's really you that can make this change really you that can to that needs to do it It's really you that has to connect with the voters.

**[Music]**

**Nana aba Duncan RE ASK:** So, what happened in the election?

**Tiffany Ford:** Well, I didn't win. I didn't win as city councilor, but I had a phenomenal campaign and I'm very proud of it.

My campaign was really successful as a councilor, it was considered, like, the most mentioned, I think, on social media, um, more than any of the councilor or even the mayor, you know?

And I started Ford Global Group, which I still have.

I really wanted to focus on making the same changes.... you know, doing advocacy work, but in a way where it's more about strategy and not me being a politician.

**Nana aba Duncan:** So, what is the one thing specifically that you are really proud that you did?

**Tiffany Ford:** Just the one thing. Whoa, that's a lot. I think the one thing that I'm really proud of is showing young people in my community that I can still live here and still win an election, still be a trustee. still living in the community and still run for city council, still living in the community. I think showing people in my community that you can be that change.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Thank you Tiffany, it was great talking to you.

**Tiffany Ford:** Thank you. It was great.

**Nana aba Duncan:** Tiffany Ford is all about her community. And remember she said she was first inspired by seeing her school trustee, when she was a young student?

Representation matters. You have to see it to be it.

So let me tell you about two more trailblazing Black women who actually came *before* Tiffany in politics. We could say they paved a path for Tiffany.

There is the Honorable Jean Augustine, who served in politics up until 2015. Augustine was the first Black woman in Parliament, elected as a Liberal in 1993. From 1994 to 1996, she served as Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

**Jean Augustine:** I think that this wouldn't happen today, but in those days, the whole notion of a woman, holding – a Black woman, an immigrant woman – holding that position was something. That, and I have some interesting stories, things that happen where you are always mistaken to be either the clerk for somebody or the secretary to somebody.

And that didn't happen in the, in Parliament itself, it's usually on the outside. But I remember going to, um, to, to, um, one country. And they were holding the elevator waiting for the minister. And when I got there with my staff and the ambassador and everybody, you know, a little entourage. And I proceeded to the elevator.

I was told, no, no, no, you can't. We're holding the elevator for the minister. Can't go in! Holding the elevator for the minister. And my staff had to jump in and say, she is the minister...But you don't allow those things to dampen the work that you have to do.

**Nana aba Duncan:** That was Jean Augustine, who entered politics after a career in education, at the age of 56. She played a vital role in Canada's recognition of February as Black History month.

Her influence doesn't stop there. In 2003 when a new Liberal leader and Prime Minister came to power, he brought on new ministers, and Jean Augustine wasn't one of them. Her exclusion was a catalyst for the community members who would go on to found Operation Black Vote Canada. Their goal was to create an organization that would support Black political civic engagement – and that's exactly what they have been doing for 20 years.

Now, I want you to listen to Zanana Akande. If we go back 30 years, Zanana was a New Democratic Member of Provincial Parliament in Ontario from 1990 to 1994. She was also the first Black woman to serve as a cabinet minister in Canada.

So, when she has advice, you'll want to listen.

**Zanana Akande:** I don't give a damn about being different from everyone else. I, if I believe that something's right or that something's wrong and that I can speak to it, it's not that my voice is going to automatically make a change. But at least my voice will bring it to somebody's attention. It may be irritating. I know that there are, there may be a lot of people that avoid me.

But nevertheless, it's important. And if it's important enough, maybe somebody else will pick up the idea.

To Black people who are currently elected. I say look in your party platform for the last election.

whatever the party is, look in the platform and say how that benefits us, and how it benefits working class people, because that's the issue, and sitting there, they'll use you as their symbol of tolerance.

And if that's not what you're there for, you gotta open your mouth and do some work.

**Nana aba Duncan:** "You gotta open your mouth and do some work." I would buy that T-shirt.

## **Credits**

Thank you to Zanana Akande and Jean Augustine for lending your voices to this project and for paving the way. And of course, thank you to Tiffany Ford.

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We'd love for you to share Black on the Ballot, subscribe, and send it to the group chat

I'm Nana aba Duncan, thanks for listening.