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Excerpts of a presentation to the African American Leadership Summit and Black Church Coalition at the Insight News Editor's Roundtable at Sunnyside Café in December.

I am the first generation to go to college in all my extended family and the first to acquire terminal degrees. The first one is in creative writing and English and the second is in anthropology. I understand what it means to return to school. I was a mother full time when I went back to get my PhD. So I bring to this position a lot of different experiences.

My entry into anthropology was accidental; I began to work on some research and people said, if you're going to go and do all that work, you might as well go and get a degree. And if I wanted to move up in my administrative job at the time, I needed to have that credential, because a creative writing degree was not highly valued in the university at that time. They kept asking, "When are you going to get a real degree?"

I call myself a "born again" anthropologist, because in many respects I had the opportunity to come to a new understanding of my experiences growing up, about the inequality I had experienced, and what I felt intuitively was wrong with living in Chicago, which is residentially segregated.

That is, Black folks who lived on the West Side didn't go to the North Side because that's where the white folks were. You didn't go past Cicero, 5500 West. Do you remember Martin Luther King's visit to Cicero? He said, "If Mississippians want to learn how to hate, they needed to visit Chicago and Cicero." It was one of the most adverse environments into which he had ever gone. I grew up in that kind of a segregated city. I have always felt that there was something wrong with my lack of access to certain kinds of things-- places that you couldn't visit, you couldn't afford, places you weren't welcome in, but I had no name for it.

It wasn't until I began to study anthropology that I became aware that there are theories that could explain this, and that there are people who have been writing about this, beginning with W.E.B. Du Bois who was first, I think, urban "anthropologist." His study, *The Philadelphia Negro* [1899] really was anthropology-- intensive, detailed research in communities in which he tried to

document and provide analysis that he hoped would help to change the social conditions of African Americans. After Du Bois, there is Charles S. Johnson, also a sociologist, who published
The Negro in Chicago
in 1921, founded
Opportunity Magazine
, established the first Race Relations Institute at Fisk University, and subsequently became President of Fisk. Du Bois and Johnson were not doing what was called sociology at that time--they were really doing anthropology—urban anthropology. I am influenced by them, and also by St. Claire Drake, an anthropologist who in collaboration with Horace Cayton continued the tradition of Du Bois and Johnson by conducting research in Chicago on Black communities. In 1945, they published
Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in an Urban City
. So I claim them all as my ancestors, as my academic and intellectual ancestors; these are the people whose research and activist scholarship really fuels me. What do I study? The social construction of inequality – I want to understand why some folks have and some folks are have nots. I want to understand structures of inequality. I want to understand how people resist such structures, negotiate them, but also how sometimes they are complicit in helping to maintain their own impoverishment and inequality. I want to understand all of that from the perspective not only of what books and experts tell me but what the people themselves have to say.

I began my career as an anthropologist by doing research in Belize, Central America. Now some of you might ask, well why didn't you do it here in the United States? And the answer would have to be a strategic one. I understood early on that if I really wanted to become a card-carrying anthropologist, I could not do field work in the United States; to be valued in this field, especially as a Black anthropologist, you have to go outside the United States. So, if I really wanted to be credentialed in a way that would command respect, and which later allowed me to get tenure in an anthropology department that at the time was ranked eleventh in the country, I had to do it their way. But I thought, I know I can find some Black folks –we're all over the Americas. Belize, formerly British Honduras, has a population that at the time I visited in 1991 was about forty-seven percent people of African descent – people who look just like us African Americans. In fact, most of us would be welcomed in Belize with open arms. People would say you've got some ancestors somewhere who connect you to us.

The other interesting thing about Belize is that there are five different "ethnic" groups. It's a multi-ethnic society. There are mestizos, people of Spanish descent, there are Garifuna, people of African and Amerindian descent. Unlike us who have this real rainbow of folks who look different yet call ourselves African American, in Belize the there are two groups of African-descended people (Creoles and Garifuna) who don't see themselves as necessarily connected. They have different histories, and do not feel that they have shared or common interests. So that was interesting and unique to me, because both groups looked "Black" to me. So why is it that they're not? Why is that they don't see themselves as part of a unified group identity? They don't marry each other; they don't necessarily interact socially with each other. So trying to understand this racial system, that was different from the United States in which we believe one drop of Black blood makes you Black, was important to me. In addition to people of African descent in Belize, there are East Indians who were recruited as indentured

servants from India, where I spent some time as an undergraduate student. Many of the East Indians in Belize tend to follow Afro-Creole culture. They speak creole. Their food is just like that of Black folks'. This is very different from what one would find in Trinidad or Guyana, where the influence of East Indian culture is very strong.

And of course you have the Maya Indians. We often talk about indigenous people as though they are all one group, well in Belize they speak Kechi, they speak Mopan, and they speak Yucatero-they are not all the same. We call them Maya, but they see themselves as having different histories and conditions. So I was attracted to learning about people from all of these ethnic groups in order to understand inequality. What I focused on was women's conditions, because sixty percent of the women in the 1991 Belize census said that their primary occupation was "home duties." They were unemployed, mostly undereducated, even though Belize has a high literacy rate, and very exploited, with a lot of domestic violence. So that is what I focused on; I talked to women in the rural areas, but I also spent time working with the Department of Women in the city. I also apprenticed with a traditional healer. I then went into the more rural areas and spent time there and collected the stories of these women. I completed my research in 1991 and in 1996 the book *Women of Belize* was published and amazingly, twelve years later, it is still in print.

I'm pleased to say in Belize, they consider it the bible. This is the book they've used, when they did their first report to the United Nations Commission to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

And, about five years ago, a Belizean press published a book called *Women in Politics in Belize* and one of the authors informed me that "we borrowed from your book very heavily." So even though the research was done in 1991, the findings and analysis are still relevant. I have used this research to serve as an expert witness for legal clinics working with women from Belize (and Suriname where I also do research) seeking asylum on the basis of domestic violence.

I came here leaving the very illustrious Ford Foundation where I managed a $10 million budget. Most of that went to the Ford Diversity Fellowship Program. If you know of any students who desire to obtain a doctorate degree in a liberal arts field, the Diversity fellowship is open to anyone who is a US citizen. Historically it was called the Ford Fellowship for Minorities, but after the challenges to race-based fellowships, the Ford Foundation felt that it needed to broaden the categories of those who could apply. I can tell you, however, that there has not been an erosion of people of color, particularly African Americans, who receive these fellowships. The program has funded almost 2,500 people, and in fact, generally I tell people if you scratch an administrator of color somewhere in this country who is either Native American, African American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Alaskan native, you will probably find a Ford Fellow. Dr. Nancy "Rusty" Barcelo, who is the new University of Minnesota Vice President and Vice Provost in the Office for Equity and Diversity, is a Ford Fellow.

At Ford, my portfolio funded Women and Gender studies and Black studies. I've had the opportunity to work with some of the great names in these fields like Henry Louis "Skip" Gates,

and Lynn Bolles-- people who have been doing amazing research and scholarship. I was able to fund the National Women's Studies Association, the National Council for Black Studies, the Women's Research and Resource Center at Spellman College, and a few organizations that historically had not received funding from Ford. I am very proud of that record.

I also am interested in what I call "advancing public knowledge." That is, I am very concerned with how to get the knowledge that is produced in colleges and universities into the public arenas, into communities, so that people can use it, so that it's not locked away in journals and things of that nature, so that it's made accessible.

I consider academic scholarly writing to be very important; but I believe writing, as Zora Neale Hurston would say, for "the folk" is also significant work. Zora is my model. She was a playwright and novelist. She was an anthropologist and journalist. She was constantly trying to find different ways to take research and communicate it to many different kinds of people.

I came to this position as Associate Vice President for System Academic Administration and Executive Director of the first Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center because it offered me many opportunities. As a program officer at Ford, I was very distant from the work itself. I could fund it. I could talk about it. But I couldn't do it. And pretty much, I'm a doer. I like to see things work. I like to work on that edge between the academy and the community in which it's situated.

The University of Minnesota is not a unique place – Spellman College in Atlanta, GA, had the same problem of connecting with the community. Spellman had a wall surrounding it. Spellman was a little enclave before Dr. Johnnetta Cole became the college's first Black woman president.

She inspired the college with her vision of service to the community to break down the mental walls, the physical walls, and began to require that service learning be a requirement for every person who walked through Spellman's gates.

So this divide between the university and the community is not unique to the University of Minnesota. It is not unique to white institutions. Fisk University experienced the same thing. There is a small wall around it. People who are outside it--and it is located right in the heart of the Black community -- don't know what goes on there. Part of the work that I did at Fisk in Nashville, TN as the Deputy Provost was in faculty development; my job was to initiate and support community outreach in order to break down those walls.

My alma mater, Grinnell College, in Grinnell, IA, is a very elite institution in the middle of "nowhere" in farm country. Once you stepped outside the gates of that institution, you realized you were looking at a rural farming community in Iowa where people had never seen Black folks before.

So this issue of disconnection or isolation from the community is not unique to the University of Minnesota; it is something that the academy is now coming to terms with. We cannot talk about ourselves as educational institutions that produce leaders without recognizing that the students

we train today go back into the community and become the community we must reach out to tomorrow. Some of our students continue to live in their communities even as they are attending school. If they do not have a connection, if we are not able to show them ways in which what they're learning inside the classroom can be of value to their communities, to their families, to themselves when they go back out there in the workforce, then colleges and universities will not be able to thrive. So they've had to change. I admire the University of Minnesota, because it's taken a major step. It has determined that its platform for success and excellence in the 21st century will be built upon an urban agenda and public engagement.

The Urban Research and Outreach /Engagement Center (UROC) is based on the Rural Outreach Center (ROC) concept. There are six of them across the state of Minnesota. They use research to help agricultural and rural communities solve local problems and inspire community-based innovations. So the University has these ROCs, and it is now saying, "We've been able to do some good in rural and agricultural communities. We need to be able to do the same in the city as well." This urban Center is a first for the University of Minnesota, and we hope nationally that universities across the country will find positive ways to interact with their neighbors, to provide resources, both intellectual and others, to communities and to work with , not for or on, communities to build their own vision of being vital, healthy and caring places.

My job as the Executive Director of UROC is to coordinate and bring a framework to the foundational work that has been completed over the last three years. We are pulling together a timeline to document the successes of our efforts thus far.

We also know that not every effort has been successful. There are going to be mistakes made, but I hope that we can recover from any mistake and move forward. I am an "action" oriented person. While I like to talk, I am not a talking head. I am also a "doer." And so my question will always be, "So okay, what can we do?

The community has said very loud and clear they are not the University's laboratory. Thus, whatever we do in this community, if we have ideas, if we want to do research, the question we must ask ourselves is quite simple: "What's in it for them?" How will the community benefit from this effort? So I am very clear about that, and I can tell you I try to keep this question in the front of my mind every day when people come to me and say, "There's this grant out there." My first set of questions is: "who are your community partners? And when are you going to bring them in?" We must understand that traditional models of doing basic research cannot apply here. We cannot bring community partners in at the end of the process. We must bring them in at the conceptualization of the research—at the very beginning. We must realize that this may mean that we can't do this grant, because it may have a quick turnaround time. So, guess what? Maybe we need to wait until next year.

My role here is to develop some guiding principles for those within the University who have an interest in getting involved in this process of community-driven research, and to develop a structure to bring the ideas to fruition. The University sees University Northside Partnership (UNP) as the mechanism buy which it was able to convene community people, organizations, and city and state government representatives. Now the question is how do we move beyond this convening? Once you've got folks together and talking, now what? How do we keep the

momentum going? I think UROC, and I love that acronym, should consider an advisory council as a part of its organizational structure to serve as the ongoing link to the UNP and the community. It's very difficult to have large meetings and expect people to attend every time you want to do something. But you can have a council that represents the different community's and other partners' perspectives.

So a UROC-UNP Advisory Council is one idea; it represents one possible model of how to make sure that the work, the interests, the concerns, the questions that the North Minneapolis community has may continue to have a structured way to get discussed. In effect, what I am saying is that there has to be an institutionalized mechanism for the community to have input into UROC, on an ongoing and formal basis.

The other area that my team (Makeda Zulu-Gillespie, our Community Liaison and Hawona Sullivan Janzen, our University Liaison) are focusing on is communications. Over three years, a lot has been accomplished. There have been numerous reports, assets mapping, minutes from community meetings, and the like. We have the UNP website (www.unpmn.org), but there is a lot of work that is occurring that the community may not have heard about. There are programs and departments that have been working in collaboration with community partners in North Minneapolis for a very long time (for example, the College of Design and Juxtaposition Arts). We now have to figure out how to pull all of the information about this wonderful work together into a single place, into formats that are accessible, and develop effective ways of communicating the value of these collaborations – through community newspapers, radio announcements, etc. In other words, we need to make better use of the resources that are right within our reach. The second thing that I've read in some of the minutes from the community meetings is people saying, "You didn't just discover this … we've been doing some of this work forever, and we'd like to have that a recognized." And so the question we are grappling with is how do you do that? We are exploring the ways in which the University can help affirm and bring more visibility-that is, elevate the profile-- of the work that has been done by community organizations and individual residents in the areas of education, health and wellness, and economic development and that reflects their efforts as assets.

The Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRC) is one example of a community organization with a long history; there are other non-profits also that have been doing important work. One of the things that I've said to my University colleagues who have expressed a desire to work in North Minneapolis is that the University has to be very careful that we don't duplicate efforts. Just because the University is bigger and may have access to greater resources, doesn't mean we need to do the same thing, or just because we can scale it up, doesn't mean that we actually do it. We must ask ourselves hard questions: what does this duplicate, is there someone out there already doing the work, are we partnering with them, and if not, why not, and if so, have we begun discussions about this particular grant or the project we wish to pursue, are our partners involved from the very beginning, what is it that we want to do, and bottom line, what will to be the outcome. We must also ask what is going to be left in place once the project or grant is finished, what is going to be the outcome of what we do that is going to help resolve or speak to, or address concerns, issues, and problems that the community has identified as

urgent?

Now, much of the discussions up to this point have been centered on problem solving. But we all know communities are not simply a constellation of problems; they are comprised of spiritual, cultural people, and research is not, or should not be, always about solving problems. Research is also about innovation, creativity, taking risks, and asking questions no one wants to hear. So one of my first questions was where are the partnerships that involve art? Where are the people (in the University and in the community) who have an interest in doing things that will feed a different kind of need, in ways that recognize our spiritual and cultural selves? We are working to identify those partnerships that already exist in the community, such as the one between Juxtaposition and the University's College of Design.

There are people already in the North Minneapolis community who have done extensive work on hunger and nutrition, on early childhood education, developing youth leadership through the arts, etc. How do we affirm their work? Could the University work with them to provide a "map" of important resources that already exists in the community? We must find ways to affirm and support the life-long civic engagement of so many committed community people and organizations in ways that will build stronger relationships, and hopefully begin to heal some of the pain and anger that lies beneath the surface, and is righteous; it is righteous pain and righteous anger about feeling invisible, about not being viewed by the city, the state, the University as assets.

Every program that may go into the UROC may not be permanent, so we must also ask, what are those projects or initiatives that need to be sustained beyond a few years? How can we work together to build the capacity in the community to take over some of this work, after the grants are finished? How do we build sustainable programs that people then can look to and use as resources, once the grant money is finished? How do we strengthen the human resources that have lived and worked in this community and will continue to do so? The idea of sustainability is something that I learned from my work at USAID. My guiding principle as an activist scholar is that even as you are building something, you must also think about how to sustain it.

I understand the concern the community has expressed about the way in which abuse of individuals and groups of people have occurred under the guise of research. And the example most often invoked is that of the Tuskegee project. It is important to understand that the Tuskegee project was conducted under the jurisdiction of the federal government. It was not a University-based project. Nonetheless, it is a tragic moment in America's research history. Despite this failing, we must recognize that all research is not evil. The type of research that will occur in the UROC is action research—that is research driven to discover solutions that we hope will empower this community. Without research, we would not have any understanding of sickle cell anemia, lactose intolerance, fibroid tumors, HIV-AIDS—issues that adversely affect our communities of color and those that are underserved. More to the point, if parents believe that the schools are not doing right by their children, or that the county is not responsive to their input, you cannot critique these situations without some kind of proof , which is provided by research. That is the bottom line. Anecdotal stories do not change policy. Only data, derived from rigorous research, changes policy.

So is there righteous research? I wouldn't be here as an anthropologist if I didn't believe that. My research in Belize gave voice to the women with whom I worked, who were uneducated: one had a fifth grade education, one had gone back to school and received her GED, another had dropped out when she was about in the ninth grade, and these were women whose stories were not usually told. Many of them also had first-hand experience with emotional and physical abuse. My book, *Women of Belize*, book gave them visibility. My research methods were collaborative and I involved the women in my research. I conducted life histories and shared the transcriptions with them before I completed my dissertation. When I presented them with their narratives, I said, "We don't have to agree on the interpretation. I might have a different interpretation than yours, but did I your story right?" For them, it was the first time that their voices were being heard, and it was important to them both on a personal level and on a policy level because now the Department of Women had data that they could take to the government to say, "You're not funding us enough to work on issues around women." But you can't do that without research.

Should there be righteous research? Absolutely. The late John Gwaltney, a Black anthropologist, went back and studied his own community. His study is called Drylongso. That's why I became an anthropologist, because I too have been the object of study. I grew up poor and we lived in public housing, so I know firsthand what it means to have people look down on you and see you as a subject to study. However, I have also come to understand that you cannot change governments, county, city, or anything unless you can present them with some hard facts. So the question is how do you know that the research is ethical, that it involves the community, and that the researcher has taken every precaution to make sure that people fully understand their involvement .

The community benefits agreement (CBA) being worked on by NRRC hasn't been presented to the University, so there is nothing that can be said, until there is a formal presentation. Is it the appropriate tool? CBAs were designed usually in response to a developer coming in, where they may be taking property away, trying to acquire large tracks of land, or they're trying to do zoning changes; and, in exchange for the community lending its support to get these city zoning regulations changed, the developers agree to do certain things.

I know of no University-community partnership in which a CBA has been signed. So I can't speculate on how the University will respond. I think the model of an Advisory Council for UROC is worth consideration; it would be a way to make sure that the community voice is always heard. It would ensure a formal process for complaints and praise. I can't see the UROC operating in a sustainable way unless it has processes that will allow it to incorporate viewpoints of the community into its day-to-day planning, and a community advisory council is one way to have this happen.

How do you make good on agreements of the past? We could talk about reparations; we could talk about what the University ought to have done right in the past—and we can get stuck in drudging up the past, and forgetting to speak to the present and the future. I can only speak to where things at the University are right now under the current leadership. And we have

amazing support from President Bruininks, Senior Vice President Robert Jones, and the rest of upper administration. I hear what you're saying, if this presidential leadership changes, how do we make sure that those things that are in place don't get eroded or disappear? If the community is building its own strength-- for example, parents need to know that they can be advocates for their children, but they also need to know how to do that. Can we help train them or facilitate them being able to go to their child's school and say, "No?" or "I want more information?" Are they aware that they may actually have a right to ask for alternate testing? When children are tested and the school says, this is the way it is, you have a right to say, "I'd like a second opinion." So to begin to get this information out to the community, UROC, using the expertise of faculty and their community partners, can do things like hypothetically publishing a document that explains parents' rights. They can exercise their rights and say, "No, I don't want my child to be part of that research." On the other hand, they may find that research can help explain certain things.

The reality is that we live in a world ruled by science. Science is about research and data collection. To opt out of a world governed by science would be like the person who prefers the kerosene lamp when everybody else is using electricity; it may work for a while, but at some point that person is at a distinct disadvantage. Not conducting research will not make issues go away. But if you can do research that can answer the questions you are asking, such as: "is there tracking of our children; are too many of our children assigned to special education; what are the basis or criteria being use to make these kinds of determinations?" Research can be a powerful tool to aid parents in challenging what they may view as an unfair or unjust educational system, or any system.

So I think our challenge is to get the community to see that the research that will be housed in UROC will answer the questions that they (the community) want answered; it will be participatory/collaborative research that is not driven by the University's agenda, but really is driven by community concerns. This is what I am communicating to University scholars and programs that come to me and say, "We'd like to do some research in North Minneapolis." My response is, "Well is this something the community wants? How do you know? Is this an issue that came out of the community meetings? Do you have partners that have said that this is important?" What I am hoping to establish by raising this questions is the beginning of a collaborative and transparent process.

Part of the reason that I accepted this position is because I do have roots in Minneapolis. My sister has lived here for more than thirty years, so I've been back and forth to Minneapolis over three decades. Also, my niece played for the Minnesota Gophers; she was the 6'7" player called "Tinkerbelle." My nephew graduated from the U, and so I have deep roots here. My mother visits regularly, so for me it's a gift to be able to be close to my mom and my sister and her family, and to have this job.

I am a firm believer in not making promises that I cannot keep, so this I promise you: I will always be direct, I will do the best I can to be responsive to the needs and to the concerns that are put to me by whatever constituents in the community come to my attention. I will try to create processes that will allow for your [the community's] voices to be heard and to make sure that your ideas and concerns get on the table and on the agenda. I am also a firm believer that

just talking about something to death is not a solution, that there has to be action, and so I will commit myself to taking action.

I wrote a New Year resolution – I must have been prescient – about Barack Obama that has to do with the fact that there has been a lot of discussion in the media about his identity. He's been very clear. He says he's Black. He's never done the Tiger Woods, 'I'm multi-this and bi-this' and so it's been a discussion that I think is to misdirect us. Black people come to me and say okay, "So you think America is ready for him? Do you really think that he has what it takes?" That's not the point. The point is that he has a right to run. He has a right to be considered a viable candidate. Part of what I asked in the essay is why we are so willing to accept Bill Clinton as the first Black president? Does anyone remember that it was under Clinton that some of the most draconian welfare reforms were put into place? Has anyone gone back and read his record? We must not be diverted by the fact that he could play the saxophone or that he went to Black churches, we must look at his record. Women and children in this country suffered in terms of welfare reform under him.

Now, does Hillary have experience? She's a US Senator. But Barrack Obama was an Illinois State Representative and he is the third African American in one hundred and fourteen years to be a US Senator. One hundred and fourteen years and all we have had are two Black Senators. So what is Hilary Clinton's claim to fame? She was married to the president. But she was not the president. So we have to be very clear that we are evaluating people, and not getting sidetracked between the old way of doing things, in the vein of Clinton, Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton, versus Obama and a new way of doing things. What we have right now at this moment is history being made: a woman and an African American man are two front runners for President of the United States of America. What we have here is an opportunity, no matter how you cast your vote.

I am not going to stand here and tell you that the University is without fault. I have heard the history. And it is not a history unique to this University. I have worked at large and small educational institutions across this county that were disconnected from the communities surrounding them. Now we can focus on the wrong doings of the past or we can move forward. This moment represents an opportunity. The University has gone on record saying it now has an urban agenda. And you [the community] have absolutely every right to hold this institution accountable to that vision. You have every right to hold all of us accountable, and to have your voices heard.