

Imani Bazzell
Thursday February 19, 2004
11:00am-11:51am
At the Urban League Area Office

As I was parking the car in the lot behind the Urban League Office, I realized that I had been here before. I have purchased t-shirts from Weiskamp, the screen printing company right next to The Urban League's office, many times before. [I think that this is symbolic of the universities relationship with the community. We see what we want to see, what we need to see, nothing more. very nice point] **GOOD ON TERESA SECTION**

I entered to office; the woman was on the phone so I waited for a few minutes. As soon as she hung up the phone I asked her if Imani Bazzell was available. She looked at me for a second and this huge smile came across her face and she asked me if I was the one who had an appointment to meet with Imani. I said yes and that my name was Teresa. She then called Imani's office and told her that she would send me up. Then she told me to go up the stairs and to the left. I went.

Imani was seated at one side a large table and was looking over many papers that were strewn about in front of her. I introduced my self and we shook hands. As she was signing the consent forms I thanked her for finding the time to meet with me. She then entered into how busy she was and how she appreciated my flexibility in arranging this meeting.

The first question I posed was that of EOTU and EBC. I asked her what she knew about the organizations and in what context. She expressed a fairly thorough understanding of both and she believes "it is an excellent thing to do."

The first real issue we talked about was the Josey event. Bernice Harrington and Ann Bishop (from the graduate school of library and information sciences) both have an ongoing, collaborative relationship with Imani. [Not sure if those names should be used publicly.] She enjoyed the event.

I asked Imani to speak on the "multiple hats" she wears...she said that she "is a community person who sort of keeps one foot in each space." **She has multiple relationships with the university. However, her relationship (which is probably similar to many other members of the community) with the University leaves a lot wanting. However, she thinks the only reason why she, a person of color, can live in the more rural section of middle America is precisely because of the University.** important tension here (We both laugh good to note this.) "...In a small mid-western town how else could, you know, a conscious person of color live here unless it were not a university town. (She chuckles "you know" almost under her breath), because the university allows, is a gateway to the rest of the nation and the rest of the world interesting phrasing that other smaller communities just would not have, which would keep them, of course, very parochial." **Good to have bolded this – very important words**

She is interested in the theoretical underpinnings of things but she wants to know see these things have an impact on everyday lives.

How does the university relate to people every day? **Not very well, if at all.**

Clear! ACTION! IMPACT! (Are what is necessary)

Are the things that the university does accessible to everyday people? No. again, clear

Imani has an agenda as a black mother. She wants to know how the library can help her. She finds that most of the comments she gets from people, at the library event for example, are comments of people in denial. This is especially true when it comes to **“uncomfortable social justice issues like race and racism.”** Imani was told by the library people that the information was out there....but what Imani is saying is “Help Me!!” (Imani states with the stress of a person who is worn out and disgusted by always being told to do these things herself.) She believes people are always trying to help you by trying to teach you to help yourself. They try to make you them. Interesting – your thoughts?

Imani’s position is “you got the damn degree in information science, use it to help me!” Whereas Imani believes that learning to do these things on your own can be a form of empowerment, it is improbable to learn how to do everything. Sometimes you just need people to do things for you, the very things that they are supposed to do. At some point she has to be able to stop learning so that she has time to actually get things done. “It’s almost as though...their approach to helping you is to try to make you them... I can’t be an information specialist, an engineer, a political scientist, I can’t be all of those things... **If everybody’s approach at the university is somehow let me teach you how to fish, I can’t spend my whole day fishing...**” Interesting take on the “university” more broadly

She feels like she is being asked to create a wheel that she cannot believe has not already been created. She feels like she is being sent off, “maybe I have to write the book myself.” “As you know I am a really busy person, I’m not lazy, I do a lot of research, I do a lot of work, what I would love is for someone to call me, or send me a package in the mail, or send me an e-mail saying “Imani I got it for you!” Imani knows that there has to graduate students to look this up. There needs to be a list of books that meets the need of conscious black children. Imani believes that people have done this work.

Imani begins to list reasons people may have for not finding “this information.” – a bit unclear as to what exactly THIS is referring to.

First of all she acknowledges that people are busy. But Imani questions whether people are they really busy or if they are just busy being busy? “...Are we busy being busy or are we busy being productive and making a difference in everyday people’s lives good question – stops me in my tracks, for one. Secondly, Imani believes that people want to do right but there is a difference between intent and conscious. People are caught up in the academy as opposed to knowing people to improve the community they live in. “One of the things that happens in the academy is that people get caught up in the academy...the academy sort of serves the academy...and hell this is a **public institution** – re: EOTU university narratives – our point of departure last time I checked, it is supported with my tax dollars!key” [University of Illinois as a Land Grant University or even just a state u.] Scholars are under the impression that talking to scholars is the best way to help people, when in actuality, being in touch with the on the ground reality is truly helpful. **Third, Imani wants to know what the point of reading from a paper or a book at a conference? [??]** I think that this is a problem for many people who are looking

for a dialogue nice point – university cultures of presentation – do it myself and I HATE it] There should be discussion, engagement; anything else is “boring”YES. It is not boring due to disinterest, but because Imani [like me and many other peopleyou agree, right?] can read on her own, she needs engagement. Imani also believes that a certain mindset keeps things closed off to the community. The Brown Commemoration is wonderful but we really need to engage. “I need to be able to engage you, to pick your brain, to let you pick my brain so that we are both bigger and better as a result of the interaction.”important on “interaction” – interaction and dialogue float across BC, but here is someone who nails it down!

People need to get out of the box. Professors and the academy need to provide for and invite the community into their space, for the benefit of both. “Are these conferences, are these gatherings for university people, is it a chance for them to get together 10, 20 times this year to sort of talk about Brown together or is it an opportunity to share with the community what the academic community knows and understands and has analyzed?” key And when the academy does bring access and resources to the community, it should not put it through a process of “dumbing it down.” Plays, dances, concerts are all fine and good, but it is in the engagement of ideas where the university falls short. Interesting – her assertion that it is the ARTS rather than hard discussion that are assumed appropriate for the community – quite a charge

I then asked Imani if she thought that this information (about good books for conscious black children to read) was not provided because people felt that black children did not need to know this “type” of information. (Essentially, I was asking if she believed that these people have an assimilation mentality and if that could be the cause for the lack of dispersal of this information.)

“The Black Cannon is not as legitimate as the European Cannon...I think that you can get a Ph.D. in Library and Information Sciences and not know shit about the Black Cannon.” This is a problem, especially in a multicultural society and it is ever present in many departments.

I asked her if she had the impression that people, at the library event for example, just don’t get it!

Imani has to start there, with thinking that people don’t get it. It is disturbing. There are layers of consciousness people have on these issues. Often times when she is engaging with people at the university Imani believes that the layers of engagement do not go deep. She believes that people got it at some point or that it is on their agenda. They just need to reawaken things that have been asleep, awaken the things that have been pushed further and further down into their consciousness, the need to “learn how to work those muscles again...their muscles have atrophied in certain areas” especially people her age and older. For some people it is the case that they have “never been their, never done that”, but not for all.provocative!

When I asked Imani to recall the Brown events she has attended she said “Girl I don’t even know!” and we both laugh whole heartedly. Imani has been to many Brown events. She recalls attending events at Krannert, the education and achievement gap event, the library talk with Professor Josey, the Incarceration speech...this is all that she can remember at this point. She has also been doing many Brown shows on WILL.

Imani is engaged on the question on Brown on a weekly basis. Half of the shows on WILL this year have been on Brown and have appeared on almost a weekly basis.

I then asked her about the comment she made on day two of “The Achievement Gap in C-U: The Unfinished Agenda of Brown”. The first day Imani attended an event in which James Anderson, a professor in the education department, gave a lecture. On day two, when Imani gave a lecture for the same event, she made reference to his lecture. I asked her about these comments. She broke down what Anderson’s perspective on the achievement gap issue was, which is in a historical context. However, Imani is not concerned with the Historical, she is looking at 2004 history – NOW – came up in Nicole’s Susan F. interview!, and concerned with the teaching and learning gap right now. Imani “wants sirens blaring” to call attention to the achievement gap in Champaign Urbana, which is not the position of James Anderson. Imani Questions this line of reasoning. KEY – moment of key tension.

“Every year that we don’t do something radical we’ve lost a whole other class of black kids WOW. In Champaign Schools, in Urbana schools, and all across the country.” We lose more black students every year.” This is a crisis to Imani and to people on the ground.

I then asked Imani a question that has been on my mind: “I just, I, I don’t know a lot of about where professors live, or if they all have kids, but it seems to me that they would somehow be connected to the community because they are a part of the community...in different ways than students are, you know? Students, they live in dorms, they live in this campus town environment. They are connected in some ways but usually when they are, they are only connected for a semester... But professors live here, and this is just something that I don’t know if you have the answer, but if they live here, if they have kids here...?” important on Teresa

That is, when discussing the connection between the academy and the community I asked her how the two could be so disjointed seeing as the Professors and faculty all live in the community and may have children in the local schools.

Imani laughs and says that it is true that faculty are more likely engaged if they have children. However, all day everyday on campus there is something to do. This is so very true. Again, stops me in my tracks. It is very easy for them to be caught up in the life of the University. “They are a wet rag by the time they go home.” YES Unless they find a way to live the two lives simultaneously. Also, the academy tend to believe that people are not an expert unless they travel and do work over 50 miles away from home fascinating read on the university, which limits the time that can be spent in the local community.

Faculty also claim that they cannot penetrate the community networks, some say “I can’t get in, I’ve tried.” Imani wants to know what the [hell!! She doesn’t say this but this is the emphasis in her voice.] that means. Again Imani emphasizes that some of the lack of involvement may stem from people being busy and some may be about bad experiences (with schools and with control of resources allocated to the community). As a community person she does not go home, she tries “to find another door to walk through” and she does not feel she has an option in this. It is her obligation to keep going.

It is difficult to engage people in these discussion because some people may feel attacked when their views are challenged, however there needs to be a place for debate. Even though there is this whole initiative of engagement, people are touchy. (Imani always feels that she has to be careful not to be an ungrateful child.)

I then asked Imani what potential Brown has for getting people engaged, and what she thinks the results of the Brown commemoration will be.

Imani thinks that Brown holds great potential. "Can't take potential to the bank." Smile She believes that this is the intent of the organizers, or one of their "hoped for outcomes". [Imani then tells me a personal story which is an example of an idea versus a plan key – yes, you bold it below. She asks me not to record this (what she just said or something else). It was a personal story that brought us together as two friends talking and sharing with each other. She talked, I listened and we laughed.] **Plan v Idea.** "...greater community involvement, engagement, having an impact on everyday people's lives in your own backyard is an idea, it is not a plan." These ideas do not turn themselves into reality. It has to go from planning to implementation, there has to be an implementation strategy to make these things a reality. It is not clear to Imani that those things are present in the Brown Commemoration. "Public engagement being an outcome of the Brown celebrations...is an idea, a wonderful idea." IDEA!

I then said that I didn't have any further questions and that I was just trying to get a sense of where she, as a community member, was coming from in regards to the Brown commemoration.

Campus mindset KEY, "mindset" that functions as an invisible barrier. The Urban League submitted a proposal that had a deep level of communication engagement. Their proposal was not granted. [Follow up: The proposal by the Urban League; Follow up with other proposals, are her arguments valid?] Have we learned anything about this – did you check out the proposal? Imani knows that people are doing things with Brown money are not as engaging as her proposal. Imani thinks that what people are doing with Brown money, tells a story. It tells many stories, a story of people's conception what engagement yes, a key construct to think about truly means.

We then end and I ask Imani if I can do a follow up at some point. She agrees to meet with me at any point, is glad that she could help and tells me to call her at any time. We hug and then she walks me out of the office.

Great exchange – and notes – any thoughts as you look back on these now Teresa – of course I recognize them from your thesis and wish now that in the thesis you could place them in context a bit more – as well as in these notes as well (i.e., the shared terrain – the library event – from which you launched the conversation).