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For as long as I can remember, a deep desire to create solutions for marginalized communities has motivated me. Perhaps these motivations developed inherently – not only did I grow up in California’s culturally rich and diverse Bay Area, but I was blessed with parents who are both deeply committed to personal development and social change. They taught me to be proud of my identity as an African-American woman, exposed me to different socio-economic realities, and nurtured my natural curiosity on issues of race. Looking to further actualizing these aspirations, I now pursue a Ph.D. in sociology because I strongly believe in the important role of research in informing and guiding the ongoing movement for societal change, to which I have committed my life. Because of my background and skills, many colleagues expected that I might pursue a career as a litigator, grant-maker or community organizer. Many of my experiences, however, have demonstrated the limitations these roles might play in me reaching my greater goals, which is speaking with knowledge on the phenomena of inequality and communicating from an informed perspective how social issues can be addressed.

Additionally, through my work as a community activist, Student Body President at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), a Coro Fellow in Public Affairs, and now as Senior Program Associate at the Jemott Rollins Group, a consulting firm serving social justice non-profits, I have too often seen the efforts of change-agents fall short due to a lack of analysis of best practices and existing academic literature. Having witnessed this inherent deficiency of objectivity and inquiry surrounding the present landscape of social justice, I seek a doctoral degree in sociology in order to help me guide and inform change. My ultimate goals are to contribute to the growing body of literature on poverty, with hopes of creating solutions and generating knowledge on the unique obstacles to social mobility faced by low-income communities of color. I also hope to instruct others, both from within and outside the academic arena, on the use of applied research as an important tool for a more just and equitable society.

Through my professional and academic experiences, I have prepared myself to be an effective graduate student, committed to studying inequality. As a student at UCLA, I maintained a 3.6 grade point average and participated in several honors societies. I gained experience as a researcher first in honors seminars where I worked with Communications Department to review literature and other multimedia resources, comparing portrayals of Jewish citizens in Nazi Germany to popular images of African-Americans from the post-World War I era to the present day. In this research project I found many of the tactics used to demonize Jews by the Nazi propaganda machine – dehumanization, vilification – were at some point, employed against African Americans. The research implications were staggering. If mass media helped sway the Germanic population into complying with the mass-obliteration of an entire race, could ongoing anti-black propaganda have a negative impact on today’s quality of life for African Americans?

Also, when studying in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil I used this immersion experience as a research opportunity to deepen my understanding of policy’s impact on injustice. As part of UCLA’s College Honors program, I worked with a faculty member to research the effectiveness of new

affirmative action legislation in increasing access to higher education for low-income Brazilians. I found through interviews with local Brazilians and a review of periodicals and admissions data, that while this controversial legislation had begun to win popular support, the law did little to address the root causes that prohibited equitable matriculation. I saw firsthand the potential of my research to potentially act as a blueprint for policy change. These and other research projects not only provided me with tools for inquiry, but also an excitement for the potential impact of research on policy, public opinion, and social action.

This interest in social justice not only influenced my choices as an undergraduate researcher, but also informed my extracurricular and professional activities, and led to the development of potential research questions. At UCLA, for example, through the Afrikan Student Union, I devoted time and energy to advocating for equitable access to higher education, tutoring and mentoring at-risk high school students, bringing attention to disparities in graduation rates among students of color, and calling for support services for students experiencing academic difficulty. Upon seeing the blaring differences in graduation rates for students from low-income high schools, I began to wonder what types of improved systems allowed under-resourced populations to compete with mainstream America. What factors allowed some poor, undocumented students, and African-American males to matriculate through higher education and others to fall through the cracks? Although my Coro Fellowship exposed me to some answers regarding these types of discriminations, I was also confronted with more questions. While a Fellow, I worked at the Housing Authority for the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) with families living in the economically-depressed Jordan Downs development in Watts, California. This experience reinforced with me the inequitable, sometimes sub-human, conditions that residents of public housing experience. I worked with residents who lived in exactly the same units their mothers and grandmothers lived in; what caused this intergenerational cycle of poverty and what tools did my residents need to break it? What alternative models of public housing, education, development, law enforcement, and incarceration would better support a livable quality of life for poor people?

Because of Stanford's esteemed faculty, its Center for the Study of Poverty and Inequality and other opportunities for interdisciplinary study, I will have the opportunity to begin pursuing answers to these and other questions. I am excited by the possibility of working with Dr. David Grusky and Dr. Matthew Snipp on their work around social mobility and demographics. I am confident that the opportunity at Stanford will challenge me to further analyze society in new paradigms, explore possibilities as a future educator, and hopefully serve as a Stanford-trained thought-leader in the next wave of inequality research.