

Episode 3 Transcript: Slow Roll

Anthony Taylor

So Slow Roll is an arts food connection and like community discovery event disguised as a bike ride.

Makeda Zulu

Welcome to Rules of Engagement, a show that highlights the projects and partnerships of the University of Minnesota Robert J. Jones Urban Research Outreach and Engagement Center. I'm your host, Makeda Zulu. In today's episode, we will be talking with Anthony Taylor, who is a guru in helping us discover things about ourselves. It's good to have you here. Anthony, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Anthony Taylor

You know, it's good to be here, and I think I would not call myself a guru, but I will say that I think that, you know, I think for a very long time, like, it's like I think I have had this very particular commitment around connecting Black people, especially to spaces they haven't been involved in. So I think long ago maybe people think about Major Taylor Bike Club, which we started almost 30 years ago, and at that time it was very simply we were biking and there weren't other Black people biking.

Anthony Taylor

And, you know, that was and slowly became, you know, about engaging people in that. And I think it expanded to include things related to outdoors more broadly. So camping and paddling and snowboarding and, you know, you know, those... or being in a park, I mean, there are just really ideas around how we really saw a very particular underrepresentation of Black people in those spaces and really began to think about and understand why.

Anthony Taylor

And parallel to that is that really committed to Black health. And I think much of that I owe to our time and relationships in terms of our elders. My mother is the founder of the Cultural Wellness Center. That's right. And so really looking at this idea of Black health and within that as active living and very specifically and I think that that's a place where I tend to live is really this idea of how is: how are we engaging active living, how are we engaging outdoors more broadly as part of a strategy for our overall well-being?

Anthony Taylor

And I think that's what has kind of morphed into as we get older.

Makeda Zulu

Well, okay. That as we get older, that's what it's morphed into. And I am going to always take you back as you know, I'm going to take you back to two places. So I first became a fan of Mr. Taylor. He had a spa, and I believe for some reason I believe it was on a Northside. But I don't...that's probably just cause I want to claim it.

Makeda Zulu

But what I loved about the spot there were, it was the colors. I think it was orange and brown, you know, very beautiful earth tones. And it had to be, gosh, in the nineties because...

Anthony Taylor

2000 was when we opened.

Makeda Zulu

Okay 2000 because you may not remember this, but Erica Badu was wearing the head wrap, the tall head wrap, and I could not ever get that done. But people in your shop had that done. And I took my niece to get a pedicure there. You called it the throne room, and I wanted her.

I know. I'm probably saying too much, but what I wanted was to be sure that her first pedicure paid for from somebody else was her auntie, and that she wouldn't think that, you know, if a man decided to pay for it or a woman, whoever, that she associated her self care with her auntie. And that's what we do for ourselves.

And then there's well, there's one more that was going to... and then Day One on Tuesdays, you and your mother had a show.

Anthony Taylor

On KMOJ.

Makeda Zulu

On KMOJ and you would talk about every day is Day One. And what I loved about their show. Hopefully I won't go on too long about this, but in their show they would have feisty conversations. And so Mr. Taylor has this voice, right. His mother also has this voice that is very calming. And when they would talk, I would hear a little raise come in both of their voices as they got heated.

And so it's nice to see that family can and especially a son and a mother can have a conversation where they disagree, but they're not disagreeable. And that gives the other people permission to do that. So I really loved Day One. So I had to talk about that.

Anthony Taylor

Well, just so that we've known each other a long time through many lives. And I think, you know, honestly it is really interesting to say that about the spa and Spa One and what we were doing, because I do believe that beauty concept is foundational for people. And I think that when we were... when we opened Spa One, that was really after me working with Aveda and I was really traveling the world and working around beauty and natural beauty.

Anthony Taylor

And it was really, you know, interesting to me that foundational to people's well-being was really beauty because it was foundational to women. And inside of a community around wellness, women were driving that. And it was and it was. And simultaneously, it will be interesting to see how people respond to this, is that I also worked in the fitness industry before that.

Makeda Zulu

Oh, no I didn't know that.

Anthony Taylor

And I was actually starting a health club company. We were in New York raising money and we had investors and investors like we literally were on Wall Street sitting in, you know, JP Morgan raising money to do this health club. And they said that and it was going to be founded on Black people. The first one was going to be in Harlem, the second was going to be in Chicago.

And they said that their data showed that women were the drivers of the fitness industry. And this is in 1992 or something like that. And their data also showed that Black women worked out in lower numbers than any other population in terms of joining a health club and working out. Which nobody argues with that probably, right?

Makeda Zulu

No.

Anthony Taylor

But at the same time, we didn't believe it because our experience was we knew a lot of Black people who worked out right. So we were using the lived experience data, right. And so we actually did a survey. We stood on Harlem on 125th Street, and we surveyed 300 Black women. And we did our own survey and asked a simple set of questions, Do you work out? If so, where? If not, why not? That was it.

Makeda Zulu

Okay.

Anthony Taylor

And what was the number one answer in 1992?

Makeda Zulu

The number one answer for why not? I know the answer. I'm not going to say it. Okay. Hair.

Anthony Taylor

Hair. It was hair care. And it wasn't hair. It was hair care.

Makeda Zulu

Right. Hair care.

Anthony Taylor

And that was an investment in hair. And so what that fundamentally said to me was that the pursuit of beauty and the end and what that meant was actually driving people away from health. I mean, it was like that was a glaring, crazy big idea for me. And even in that, you know, after that, I go work for Aveda, which is primarily looking at natural beauty, looking at wellness and primarily a brand sold to white women, you know, their core customer.

And they would probably disagree with that. But it also was this idea of the pursuit of beauty towards wellness. It was like a really interesting switch in terms of the branding and what I really saw was Black women were attracted to it, that they were really attracted to this idea of well-being and natural products. And so we did another survey.

So even in 1995, the fastest growing group of organic consumers was African American women.

Makeda Zulu

I didn't know that.

Anthony Taylor

And the fastest growing users of natural personal care products: aromatherapy, homeopathy, you know, naturopathy. It was Black women and we did that again in 2000. And that number was still true in terms of the trend. And that was why we started Spa One, because we really thought, what if we could do a beauty concept targeting Black women that actually elevated natural hair as a foundational set of services.

Beauty, body care, massages, pedicures. And what if we made the picture beautiful as opposed to now is totally transactional? It is... Most women get a pedicure and they hate it, but it's cheap and their toes look great. And so it doesn't it doesn't actually...

Makeda Zulu

Sometimes there's a very good massage and that does make a difference. And it's quiet time away.

Anthony Taylor

It's an okay massage. It's not great. And I see the whole point is that it needs to be great. Right. And you know, I mean, that was the idea. So I know our pedicure was award winning. It was. It actually was, it was voted best service in America in 2001.

Makeda Zulu

I believe that

Anthony Taylor

But again, this idea of beauty concept driving wellbeing and it shows up differently. And women of European descent, they have a different set of standards that pursue beauty and drives them out of health shows up as eating disorders or I mean there are lots of ways where dysfunction around beauty actually drives people away from the health that they pursue.

So that's a long story in terms of why we got started. But the idea that people pursue things that are highly valued and beauty is very highly valued. I mean, beauty is a foundational concept in terms of self-concept, feeling beautiful, looking beautiful, being attractive. And even now, I mean, if we look at what's happening now, it's very, very deep, is that it is this pursuit of what we perceive as beauty and still is thinness is showing up in a strange way.

Matter of fact, just recent pediatric standards on if you read this, But the new pediatric standards have now approved pediatricians to prescribe weight loss drugs for children under 12.

Makeda Zulu

No.

Anthony Taylor

For real. And so because again, we have some issues around weight and weight gain and weight loss. And we don't really see active living as a strategy. Right. We're now thinking about it differently. And so there are lots of ways. And again, like I said, this is unfortunately how my mind works, right. I sit around and look for these things.

Anthony Taylor

But I do think that this idea of body image, and body image is really a big deal for all people, that there are very particular standards of it. I believe that the way that Black women were responding to white, you know, to hair care in 1992 and to some degrees till this day around, straight hair, perfect hair is white supremacy implanted and, beauty, you know, that the challenges around thinness.

It really is again, you know, it's glamorizing a perceived, you know, view of the European body. So once again, it's white supremacy in action and is showing up in all these very different ways. And in the modern era, you know, that it's been co-opted in a weird way. So now the body has become dysmorphic and now it's out of proportion.

And then, I mean, the Internet is doing something very different. So, the ideas around self-concept, body image, you know, self-care, the like when we really deal... and wellbeing, which is wellbeing is really not fitness and it's not aromatherapy. It is actually what, what is your outlook for yourself Like that's wellbeing, this sense of a positive outlook for your existence, you know, and that is what we're trying to create is, is activities that you, when you wake up and you stand up, that your outlook for your future is positive.

Right?

Anthony Taylor

Engaged. Right. And includes you. Right. And you know, so that's also an expanded definition around what we're trying to achieve with these wellbeing pursuits. And maybe you can get that through a pedicure.

Makeda Zulu

But you know, it's sometimes it's a start, you know? Right. And sometimes at the start, because, you know, with you saying that, you know, I think of you know, when I think of Black women, self-care is probably the last on the list. Caring for everybody else is what is important in the Black women that, you know, Black women I hang around they, you know, "what can I make sure my kids have you know, "my friends have" whatever.

And so, you know, a pedicure is like just a flash into what we define for ourselves or what we want for ourselves. But let's talk about Slow Roll.

Anthony Taylor

Okay.

Makeda Zulu

So how did you come to UROC with Slow Roll and can you tell us what Slow Roll is?

Anthony Taylor

Yeah, so Slow Roll is a bike ride disguised as something... It's actually, you know, I would say it actually is an arts, food, connection, and community rediscovery event disguised as a bike ride. That's really what it is. And we, we kind of came a Slow Roll because I was I'm told I was one of the founders of Major Taylor Club, which was a sport bike club.

So, you know, the joke I tell about biking is that spandex scares people. And a lot of people in spandex scares most people and a lot of people in the same spandex gear as everybody. Right. And so biking, so much of what we think of as biking is that's the highest order, right? You show up in spandex, you have an expensive bike and you ride.

And so we, you know, we were doing that. And there's value there.

Makeda Zulu

Yeah.

Anthony Taylor

But it also turns off people. It also excludes people. It's also it's not inviting and nurturing, you know what I mean? And so what I realized is we weren't growing. And so I wanted to do something different that I thought was going to be more attractive. And I literally was on a trip to Detroit and I ran across this bike ride.

I mean, it was literally 3000 people. And they were riding through Detroit. They close off the streets. And Detroit has a lot of big streets and a lot fewer people. And the idea was that it wasn't a sport ride. It was literally a ride to discover. And the first Slow Rolls when I found that was interesting, they didn't tell you what the route was.

You just showed up someplace. Right? And then you did the route. And when you were done, you hung out and you had a social event. So Slow Roll is a bike ride. And those are kind of the tenets of Slow Roll that you show up nobody knows about. We don't tell anybody the route and we don't post the route.

No one knows.

Makeda Zulu

People can get lost that way.

Anthony Taylor

No, they're together, right? That's the other thing.

You have to stay together. You have to.. you bring whatever bike you have. If you don't have one, we have one for you. We start with music and DJ and we have refreshments and we end with a community meal. Right. And again, everyone has a theme to highlight some part of the community they don't know because that's the other thing I've kind of found.

People live in cities and communities, but they really only know their start point in their end destination. Like they don't know in between, right? And, and even those of us who love Northside, for example, like we really teleport through the Northside, we don't really know in between, you

know. And so the idea of using Slow Roll as a way to help people rediscover their own neighborhood and the beauty of it.

And show them like no one says Northside, the home of pocket parks, you know, the Northside of all the communities we have, has the most pocket parks in.

Makeda Zulu

What is a pocket park?

Anthony Taylor

It's like the little park over by Jerry Gamble Boys Club, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Makeda Zulu

I know what you're talking about.

Anthony Taylor

Or the little park over by Sheridan and you go south on Sheridan and there's a little park right there.

Makeda Zulu

Yes.

Anthony Taylor

Yeah, that's a pocket park.

Makeda Zulu

Right off of Plymouth?

Anthony Taylor

Yeah, There are pocket parks all over the Northside. Okay. And it's surrounded by the river, Theodore Wirth Parkway, Victory Memorial parkway. And you've got, you know, Lake of the Isles Park. And so no one says Northside. The home of pocket park surrounded by beautiful greenways.

Makeda Zulu

That's really good. And that's a good point.

Anthony Taylor

I mean, that's exactly right. So the identity of Northside is never built on the beauty of Northside. Yeah, it isn't built on the African-American legacy. You know, it isn't built on the transition of the

Jewish tradition and the African-American tradition and the legacy of settlement houses on the Northside. And I mean, so we do bike rides where we highlight those things as part of the ride.

And then we always have music and we end with a community meal. So people don't go, "how far was that?" You know, "what was that distance? What was my time?" You know what I mean? And then the only rule of Slow Roll: You have to meet someone you don't know. And so that's really the idea and really how we wound up at UROC that really, one UROC is in the center of a community and geographically it's kind of like when you draw the Northside and you think about what we're talking about from the river, the Theodore Wirth Parkway, Victory Memorial, over to the south. It's, you know, this is about 20. The address is 20, right? Yes. And I'm also a geography nerd, so most people don't know the city is a perfect grid, Right?

So 20, going 20 blocks south. Right. And 20 blocks north, 20 blocks north puts you basically victim memorial 20 blocks south puts you just south of 394. Right? And so this is kind of geographic. And then if you go to the east, towards the river, right. You run into the river in about a mile.

And Theo is about a mile the other way. And so it's also this really interesting central location here. And where UROC is Also at one point, just the history, this was where the McDonald's was on the corner. This is where Lucille's Kitchen was this is where, you know there's....

Makeda Zulu

King's Supermarket.

Anthony Taylor

King's Supermarket

Makeda Zulu

The Way.

Anthony Taylor

The Way. The significance of The Way as a point of origin here. Yeah. Is actually just quite amazing. So that's what we do on a Slow Roll all that we just talked about, we point out to people in a bike ride. And so what happens is now you're moving not through a community, but in a community.

And so all of a sudden you can see all these things and then after you've seen them, you can't unsee them. Right? And so I think that's the part of it. And so choosing UROC was perfect for that. And the other thing we did for UROC, and really bless your heart for this is we've done our overnight bike rides, right?

And so everybody said "you did and overnight bike ride?" Yes. We annually do an overnight bike ride and you have been on a regular staff for us a number of times and been able to kind of pull up here,

use the bathrooms, stop here, always have a presentation here because UROC, in terms of this geography, once again, is historically tied to so many aspects of North Minneapolis history.

Okay. That we have stopped here and had music. And it's been the middle of the night and it's been 4 a.m. in the morning as you know, all these different times. And Plymouth Avenue, again, the historic history of Plymouth Avenue as the actual central business district for North Minneapolis. It wasn't Broadway, it was Plymouth. And so there's also some symbolism here in terms of that for us historically.

And I think that's really again, that's our thing is how are we putting people in community disguised as a bike ride. And so UROC has been important and a continuous partner because that's the other thing about Slow Roll is we anchor in terms of relationships. And so we use, you know, UROC as a partner in a location for all those things as well.

Makeda Zulu

And I'm so glad that you chose us. Another thing that you do right is making sure that...you talked about us being active doing camping. I didn't know about the camping. I might be able to do that but in the wintertime Black folks busy in the cold can and then you had what international or were they snowboarders I'm sorry the celebration event.

Can you talk a little bit about that?

Anthony Taylor

So we started a winter kind of event called Melanin in Motion. And really, again, it looks like we're trying to get people to snowboard and ski and all those things. But what we really realized is we're actually just trying to help particularly African-American people change their relationship to winter. Because we live in Minnesota.

I mean, it's just part of it. But from an active living perspective, you know, if you have this thing that says, I'm going to shut down on October 31st and I'm not going to go outside again until April 1st, it really ruins you. It is the least healthy thing you can do. Yeah. And so we have really said, well, we live in a place that is actually a city, you know, a municipality that makes significant investments in the built environment and in programming to actually support people to be active outdoors and Black people need to benefit from those investments too.

So we do a regular every Monday night throughout, you know, starting right around, you know, mid-December, we do cross-country ski lessons for families and youth. Every Monday night. We're doing Thursday night snowboarding program for Black girls on weekends, we offer snowboard lessons at Theodore Wirth Park. That was the other thing for us is we wanted to place these activities in our community.

And so the idea of making you drive an hour to learn to snowboard is a perfect reason for you not to learn to snowboard. So we said, well, why don't we do it in the community? And many people don't know the legacy of Theodore Wirth Park having a ski jump. Actually, you know.

Makeda Zulu

I did not know that.

Anthony Taylor

Yeah, absolutely. It actually had a ski jump.

Makeda Zulu

Is that what the big hill that we slide down, was that?

Anthony Taylor

The big hill used to be a ski jump right on the front there.

Makeda Zulu

Okay.

Anthony Taylor

Yeah. And, and many elders if you talk to many of the elders in the community they will tell you about learning to ski at Theodore Wirth Park.

Makeda Zulu

No I did...wow

Anthony Taylor

And it's so interesting. So we wanted to bring it back. So we, you know, we really have done that. And I think we do a Friday night family night at Trollhaugen where we go skiing there. But the biggest thing was we incorporated lessons and equipment taught by Black instructors in the community, in the neighborhood like that was really foundational.

And so what we found is that people don't actually hate winter, they just hate being cold. I mean, that's the... we had to reframe it. Right? Any time, any time you talk to somebody rather than saying you really hate winter or do you hate being cold, okay, so they can keep you warm, you go do this with me.

And that's really been the hook to get people to start. But broadly, I do believe that outdoors and outdoors activities are great development activities. I think that they are not, I mean, they're not like traditional sports where I mean, honestly, 80% of people are cut by the time they're in 9th grade.

Makeda Zulu

I never got cut from a team.

Anthony Taylor

And you were one of the fortunate few. But what happens is they don't stay active.

Makeda Zulu

I was never on a sports team [laughter]. I was. No, I know, but I was a cheerleader. There you go. In a school that didn't have other leaders, I was determined.

Anthony Taylor

Nobody worked harder than cheerleaders.

Makeda Zulu

That's right.

Anthony Taylor

I mean, that's true. But no, you know, that was really the idea is that how we get people involved in active living early and get them involved in activities that are like that's the secret sauce of outdoors is that it's really a personal development strategy. It's not a sports strategy.

Makeda Zulu

Right. Well, and it's a community. That's what I saw in your celebration. I mean, you had young people as coaches, I think. Right?

Anthony Taylor

Yeah we had 14 to 17 year olds that were trained to coach the rest of the community and they got paid to be there. And they were really proud. And I think the thing that they say afterwards is that really the acknowledgment from the community was more important than the pay. Right? Because, you know, I mean, and working with nine year olds who think you're a hero, that is, you know, that's really validating.

So I think those are the aspects of it that are most important.

Makeda Zulu

That was almost full circle.

Anthony Taylor

Yeah.

Makeda Zulu

When you think about the service feeding something for us.

Anthony Taylor

Absolutely.

Makeda Zulu

Okay. All right. So, Mr. Taylor, I think I think we have to wrap it up. We're, I think we're close to time. If people want to know more, want to get involved in Slow Roll, Melanin in Motion, what is the camping name?

Anthony Taylor

It's all under Melanin in Motion. So that's everything but they can go to MelaninInMotion.org. Okay And they can leave a note for information updating programs, those kind of things. And they can also get to us through the culturalwellnesscenter.org.

Makeda Zulu

Very good. Very good. And what I will say as a testimony, you don't get shamed for signing up and not showing up or signing up, showing up and then not following the entire trip, just always welcomed with love. And I think that's wonderful. I think that gives us hope that one day we can be in motion.

Anthony Taylor

You know, being in motion is the goal. Yes, that's it. So if you're in motion, you're winning.

Makeda Zulu

Alright, well, amen. Thank you for being here today.

I want to give a special thanks to Mr. Taylor and to Nina Shepherd, who's with the Office of Public Engagement and UROC Senior communications director.

Today's episode was produced by Blackbird Revolt and engineered by Stan Tekiela, edited by Jordon Moses. Please make sure to subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. To learn more about UROC and our many community partnerships visit UROC.UMN.EDU edu that is U-R-O-C dot U-M-N dot E-D-U.

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