

The positioning of the ethnographers came up repeatedly in the AC meeting. This needs to be addressed in the preface or intro.

Where is the ethnographer in the picture? This is necessary both to make sense of it and to judge its veracity.

In the intro selectivity of the snapshot/events needs to come into play.

Things from chapter three needs to be foreshadowed

Things we wish we could have studied.

More on the Brown year and the committee selection of the events (it is telling of what we saw as important.

The paid audience versus the paid ethnographers

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## Introduction

In 2003-04, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign hosted a year-long, comprehensive commemoration of the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision on school desegregation. On- and off-campus units and individuals were invited to apply for *Brown v. Board of Education* Jubilee Commemoration funding to support events, performances, lectures, readings, films, and exhibits. This initiative resulted in hundreds of events that were, in turn, supplemented by many unofficial but related occurrences-programs [not sure about this word]. The University of Illinois' effort stands as perhaps the most extensive attempt by a U.S. university to launch a comprehensive conversation on race and diversity through the commemoration of *Brown*. A supplement to this enormous effort was the campus decision to study the commemoration itself; hence the genesis of the Ethnography of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Jubilee Commemoration—EBC for short. EBC, a research collaborative of 10 undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty, used ethnography, namely sustained participant observation or field research, to study both the public life of the *Brown* Commemoration (BC) year and the campus's broader "dialogue" on race and diversity. The EBC charge was a very open one, stipulating only a report due by mid-November, 2004. The decision to close this report with urgent recommendations is our own. [how are we using Brown—for the decision or the commem]<sup>[msal]</sup>]

By way of introduction, we present a few words about EBC's research aims and the processes of inquiry-it-sponsored-methods. The report's third chapter is wholly devoted to explaining EBC's approach to studying the *Brown* Commemoration. EBC was born of both serendipity and careful vision. Serendipity arrived in the form of a campus visitor from the National Science Foundation, who happened to meet on the same day in Fall 2003 with members of the *Brown* Commemoration Planning Committee and organizers of the Ethnography of the University (EOTU). She concluded that individuals involved in the two campus-wide initiatives would do well to explore their complementary interests. The shared vision of these interests can be credited to the *Brown* Commemoration Planning Committee, but as well to then-Chancellor Nancy Cantor and then-Provost Richard Herman, who jointly charged the *Brown* Committee, and again to Cantor, who had designated EOTU as a Cross Campus Initiative. Together, she and committee members envisioned how EOTU's commitment to undergraduate research and to

serious, reflective institutional self-examination could result in both documentation and interpretation of the year-long campus effort. Consequently, EOTU was commissioned to compose a team that would study the *Brown* Commemoration year. EOTU agreed to this arrangement with the understanding that undergraduates—compensated for their time—would be the project’s primary ethnographers. In October 2003, a group of four undergraduates, two graduate students, and four faculty members set to work observing, interviewing, discussing, and writing on a weekly basis.

Many months into this project in Spring 2004, the EBC team had an “a-ha” moment<sup>[msa2]</sup>—a moment that came, fittingly, immediately after a group interview with Chancellor Cantor herself. The insight was that we at EBC were not outsiders studying the *Brown* Commemoration, but we were, instead, a critical part of the *Brown* year. Although we had learned day by day that the commemoration meant many things to its various constituents, it was, by original intent, an ambitious effort to engineer a campus dialogue on race and diversity. Chancellor Cantor developed this point several times during the interview, and, as we left the Swanlund Administration Building, we could not help but realize that the commemoration had mobilized us as an instance of the larger *Brown* vision—a group of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty ourselves engaged in a nearly year-long dialogue on race and diversity on our campus. This report, then, is in large part the product of our own dialogue, a dialogue that is one thread among many and draws from a number of strands of campus conversation.

By the time EBC was ready to begin drafting this report in May 2004, with seven months of undergraduate ethnography behind us, we had amassed an online database containing a wealth of fieldnotes, namely the student-ethnographers’ reports on *Brown* events as well as interviews and other research-related observations and activities. The web-archived fieldnotes, ranging from two to eight pages per setentry, were then commented on in writing by all of the members of the EBC research team. These documents became rich conversations in their own right with copious responses, criticisms, connections, and queries. How we built this web-trail and in turn how this web-trail became this report is detailed in chapter 3. It is critical to underscore that our ethnography captures but a fraction of *Brown* events; to wit, local readers will may be very disappointed by all that what is not here. As chapter 3 details, we attended events selectively and in turn have documented them selectively here. Further, while there is some method to our editorial hands, both in the selection of which events to attend and to feature, there is also serendipity: the passions or interests of one or another ethnographer, the happenstance of schedules, the lack of accessible imits in the reach of the information on the timing of *Brown* events, and the tastes of and limitations of our writing team. With its resolutely local lens, ethnography is necessarily partial: the ethnographer attends one event and misses another; she talks to one person rather than another; her attention is drawn to one corner of the room and not another and so on. **\*\*[see comment below]** The hubris of ethnography, however, is that the accretion of events, moments, and conversations can make forrom observations and analyses that are more than anecdotal, that do indeed capture social essences and realities. In this spirit, the best ethnography is necessarily long-term; as chapter 3 documents in considerable detail, the ethnographic research that comprises this report was begun hastily and conducted by undergraduates with full course loads, and directed by faculty and graduate students who were not relieved of any of their regular university duties. One of the commentators on an earlier draft of this report charged us with “drive--by ethnography,” calling attention to the partial and perhaps hurried nature of the project; we did not protest and chapter 3 offers a discussion of both

the project's limits and a call for more sustained and well-planned collaborative ethnographic projects of this sort variety. [does it?] Chapter 3 also introduces the long-wish list [DOES IT] of activities things we would had hoped to include but could not because of time or logistical constraints. ve [does it?]-liked-to-have-had-time-for- How-We we had wanted to spend more time with the many people who for whatever reason had absolutely nothing to do with the Brown year. How we had plannewished we could have to followed up on more of those projectfunding proposals that were-ultimately not funded by the Brown Ceommittee. And -How we had intended wished we might have been able to trace more Brown trails, namely the paths of individualspeople or groups who were in one way or another touched by-a Brown events. The wish list is very-long, but we nonetheless stand behind the arguments and recommendations made in this reportunderseoring again the project's necessary partiality.

[not sure of place] Readers of this report will no doubt be struck by its ethnographic tone: drawing on events, conversations, and interviews, this is an interpretive work. Namely, we have made sense of our materials through our own particular lenses. The fieldnotes themselves are colored by these lenses, as were the many on- and off-line discussions we had about our data. To the readers who protest the way in which we make sense of one or another moment at an event, or snippet from a conversation, we offer "such is ethnography and the human science of meaning." <sup>[msa3]</sup> The interpretations we make here are ones we labored over; in some cases there are single interpretive sentences that were culled from hours of conversation about even just a moment at an event. Because the report draws from the work of 9 [we say 10 above?] people, and from a 6-person writing team, it is very hard to assign the "we" of the writing to one or another person's particular subjectivity; this said, however, "we" are happy to claim the report as a subjective venture and to acknowledge that the interpretations are informed by 'who we are.' In "The Research Team" in Chapter 3 we introduce some aspects of those subjectivities. In that chapter we also introduce the way in which we undertook, at the micro-level, the interpretation that resulted in this report. [is this a good place to give a brief description of the ethnographers that we'd talked about adding last we met?]

For EBC, this report is a way-station on the way toward production of a book that we have titled *A Hard Year Downstate: A Student Ethnography of Race and the University*. We have high hopes for the book as a critical discussion of race and the university and as an example of serious collaborative research that involves both students and faculty. At our most ambitious, we imagine it circulating across the campus as required reading in large classes or perhaps as a book to be read and discussed in the residence halls. We cannot stop ourselves from thinking in terms of conversational threads that just keep evolving, making and transforming the university as we know it. *A Hard Year Downstate*, a title that we knew was right the moment we chanced on it, will build on this report's three chapters, adding a first chapter, "A School District Under Fire, a Disputed Mascot, and a Controversial Chancellor," and a final chapter, "The Paid Audience: Four Student Ethnographers." In that final chapter each student ethnographer reflects on their Brown year both as an EBC researcher and as an undergraduate grappling with issues of race and education at the University of Illinois. That said, this report is very important to EBC as a document that can stand on its own, and to which we can receive feedback as we head toward completion of the book manuscript in June ~~2005~~2006. We therefore offer this report not to be filed away, but to be read and discussed. We invite anyone who reads these pages—or who is urged toward them—to contact us. We offer this, then, as a work-in-progress in the truest sense.

Every group of people, every project, takes on its own idiom—key words, phrases, and even jokes—and EBC was no exception. We spare you the jokes, but the key words and phrases are front and center in the pages that follow. None is perhaps more important than “register.” We are grateful to linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli who brought it to our attention. We began to speak among ourselves of “university register” to mean the myriad of unspoken rules and norms of language that govern everything that happens at a university, or for that matter in any human community or institution. We were most focused on the way a dialogue on race is shaped by the university register, the received university mode of representing the world, which we have also called “business as usual.” In this vein, we stress that the conventions of academic talk about race—as a distant are a worthy object for objective study. Further, we note that race is often taken up at the university through the term “multiculturalism,” which manages to elide difficult conversations that confront the reality of race on this campus. When we first encountered the term “register” in early April 2004, it spoke volumes to us for a simple reason: we had become collectively more and more interested in those moments, conversations, and actions that somehow broke or challenged business as usual, including ~~race~~-talk about race, at the university. We were drawn to those challenges because we considered them to be the moments of the *Brown* Commemoration year that truly had the potential to spark a meaningful campus dialogue on race and diversity.

Business as usual with respect to race at the university presented an irony. The *Brown* year produced many campus conversations about (as well as programs devoted to) the value of diversity, but dearth of dialogue about the many unsettling aspects of race and inequality in the contemporary United States [is this true? I’m not so sure about this? I’d think more accurate (and safer?) to replace “dearth” with “relatively less”]. We suggest that this irony speaks to our historical moment. In 2003, the *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* decisions on admissions at the University of Michigan affirmed the high court’s 1978 *Bakke* decision in which Justice Powell wrote that educational diversity is a compelling state interest. The *Grutter* and *Gratz* decisions named diversity as a primary value in higher education, one that contributes to an institutional brand of excellence, yet narrowly tailored the role race can play in admissions decisions. The Supreme Court represented educational diversity as an asset for corporate and military America, but emptied the term of any meaningful reference to historical inequities and injustices. Diversity, then, is sanctioned as a resource for spurring institutional advancement, but not a means to the end of pursue social justice<sup>[msa4]</sup>.

As we wrote this report, particularly chapter 1, we came to appreciate that EBC itself, however modestly, mounted its own challenge to university business as usual. In the course of our research, we could not find an example of a collaborative ethnographic study authored by a diverse group of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty—people with quite different investments implicated differently by the university register.

Such an intimate collaboration proved essential because the *Brown* year was an exhausting whirlwind of events, exhibits, and performances. The sheer number and breadth of events organized by the campus community overwhelmed the student ethnographers, and the EBC team knew from our day one, which was already into October, well after the commemoration had begun, that we would never be able to “capture” *Brown* in full. As time passed, however, we had enough of a sense for the landscape of the year that we could “register” what stood out, what differentiated some moments that enabled dialogue to go beyond the simple