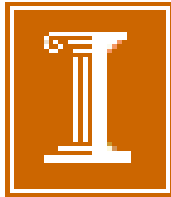


**ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT ON THE JUBILEE  
COMMEMORATION OF THE *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION*  
SUPREME COURT DECISION, University of Illinois**



Prepared for the  
**Jubilee Commemoration Organizing Committee**

**Ethnography of the *Brown* Commemoration Team**

**Nancy Abelmann  
Mark Aber  
Rene Bangert  
Paul Davis  
William Kelleher  
Nicole Ortegon  
Peter Mortensen  
Teresa Ramos  
Amy Wan**

**with Catherine Prendergast**

**Ethnography of the University Initiative  
c/o Department of Anthropology  
109 Davenport Hall MC-148  
607 S. Matthews Ave  
Urbana, IL 61801  
(217) 244-7733  
eui-info@uiuc.edu  
www.eui.uiuc.edu**

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#### **4.0 Upon Reflection: Envisioning, Experiencing, and Acting on the *Brown* Year**

The U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 reenergized the quest for racial justice and social transformation in the United States. Some historical accounts credit the decision with initiating a Second Reconstruction: it brought mass and momentum to the civil rights movement by striking down the last legal emblem of slavery. For doing so, *Brown* certainly deserved the sustained reconsideration it received at the University of Illinois during its jubilee year. While many educational institutions allotted attention to it in the spring and summer of 2004, few institutions awarded it the time and energy the University of Illinois did. This chapter describes the vision, the effort, and the people who produced the *Brown* year. It attempts to understand the positions of key players through the results of ethnographic interviews. It then analyzes how the *Brown* year affected one of its primary audiences, U of I students. Through an ethnographic account of critical events, the chapter attempts to show how historical analyses, sociological evaluations, and personal reflections offered by *Brown* lecturers and performers elicited student debate and dialogue—or failed to do so. We show how students took up the challenge and spirit of the *Brown* year through the activities they organized on our campus, and close this chapter with examples of ways in which the year inspired some people to rethink the university's physical and social boundaries. We focus particularly on the words of people who took the commemoration as an occasion to imaginatively reconsider the relationship between the university and its surrounding communities; our off-campus interlocutors help us to peer at the university from the outside and thus see it afresh.

The 1954 *Brown* decision offered both a critical historical backdrop and future horizon for many of the people whose words, dialogues, and interactions we draw on in this chapter. The Jubilee Commemoration exploited this paradox as it organized lectures, performances, and exhibits that enabled participants to evaluate the present through the lens of the *Brown* decision. The mission statement for the commemoration declared: “The University of Illinois intends for this commemorative year to renew the spirit of social justice that spurred such commitment to this important cause a half-century ago with the *Brown* court case.” In response to this intention, commemoration participants voiced both old and new perceptions of race. Many of the people depicted in this chapter appreciated the social movements that *Brown* spawned, but as they examined its unfulfilled promises they also named questions and quandaries about unresolved problems of race in the United States. Events featuring participants in civil rights activities—Reverend Cox, the Brown sisters, Melba Beals, and the original Project 500 students, for example—did indeed seem to rekindle “the spirit of social justice,” but events attempting to define “social justice,” or the means to achieving this end, or the university's role in promoting that end, often led to more complicated and contentious discussions.

##### **4.1 The Producers: Envisioning the Promise of *Brown***

From the start, organizers of the commemoration faced imposing challenges to the goal of producing a coherent campus-wide series of events to be held over two semesters. Perhaps the first challenge lay in competing with the extraordinary number of special

events scheduled on campus every day, another aspect of business as usual at the U of I. We cite a Friday in recent memory as an example. On that day, the especially ambitious, curious, hardy, or self-destructive campus member could have lunched at the campus YMCA while listening to a veteran community organizer discuss “Democracy and the Public Good”; hustled to the Levis Center, six blocks away, to hear Stanley Fish, famous for his nay-saying punditry in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, forecasting a shriveled future for the humanities; and then scurried back across campus to hear Nancy Folbre, visiting from the University of Massachusetts, discuss the transnational dimensions of care for the elderly in the United States. Those seeking a cultural nightcap could choose among a performance by the Virsky Ukrainian National Dance Company, a staging of *King Lear* set in post-World War II Europe, or “At Harlem’s Heights,” a touring production of The New York Festival of Song. These were only the most prominent events: meanwhile, individual departments across the campus hosted scholarly and professional presentations discussing developments in their fields, listened to job talks from prospective faculty members, or judged the dissertation defenses and capstone performances given by decidedly anxious graduate students. Even less notable, but equally vital to the maintenance of university machinery, were the department meetings, the subcommittee meetings, the conferences with individual students, the reviews of others’ scholarship, the class preparations, and the myriad other tasks that faculty and staff complete. Students, meanwhile, prepared for classes, met in various social and academic clubs, boarded buses for weekends at home, watched or participated in a variety of athletic events, prepared for a night of socializing, or relaxed. Those charged with organizing *Brown* events needed not only to intervene in this ongoing welter of events, but also to claim a priority among them.

Further, while the committee sought to involve all campus colleges in the hosting and sponsoring of events, and to disperse *Brown* events among as many departments as possible, it also sought to orchestrate these events from a campus administrative center. The U of I’s diffuse organization sometimes makes its wealth of programming seem incoherent. This organization, good in that it fosters academic freedom, also presents a formidable challenge if a high-level administrator wishes to channel programming in a single, intellectually coherent direction. Such programming, which calls on the cooperation of all disciplines across campus, must somehow solve all the frustrating problems of ascertaining speaker availability, reserving appropriate space, assuring that the campus spokesperson for an event is appropriately credentialed, sufficiently impressive, adequately motivated, and so on. At the same time, it must take care not to ruffle the feathers of college and department administrators accustomed to sponsoring events of their own volition.

Framed in this way, the Commemoration Committee’s challenges to usual university practices of decentralized event planning may seem primarily logistical and practical, or to involve, at worst, the occasional unpleasant telephone conversation or email exchange. We suggest, however, that the challenge was deeper and more profound, questioning the university’s singular focus on excellence. Readers hardly need our reminder that the word “excellence,” simultaneously overfull and empty of meaning, resists precise definition, or that the arts, humanities, and sciences use different criteria to assess excellence. Nevertheless, excellence appears as a constant exhortation in messages from the U of I’s current and former presidents, chancellors, and deans to faculty members, students, and

the general public. It stands as the watchword guiding decisions on whether to hire, grant tenure to, or promote faculty members. Increasingly, it appears in conjunction with descriptions of the university's undergraduates, as each incoming class's aggregate test scores rise. Inevitably, the word "excellence" is comparative: the university strives to become more than a "best value" in rankings of colleges and universities published by various magazines; it seeks to be among the best without qualification. The university can gain such recognition only by creating and maintaining campus-wide excellence.

Programming with the potential to question the depth and durability of the university's commitment to diversity carries risk because it implies or directly states a critique of this standard of excellence. Risk increases as that potential is realized in a series of events across campus. Such risk may be acceptable if it is widely understood that critique preserves the vitality of excellence. That is, only if excellence is understood by definition as a dynamic quality that can be sustained only under close, unremitting scrutiny; and that efforts to preserve excellence as a static essence spell its doom. On a large campus with many competing units, methodologies, and goals, however, widespread agreement about the nature of excellence or the necessity of critique to maintain excellence cannot be assumed. The conventions governing publication of research demand that authors undergo peer critique of their journal articles and book manuscripts: such reviews are understood as vital to scholarship. Students, too, learn in high school and later in college that peer review and critique are essential to the creation of successful documents. But when this process of critique shifts from individuals to the public domain, and when the topic is local lived experience, members of the campus community may be more apt to resemble those parents who wrote to express their unhappiness with the commencement address given by Lani Guinier. They may hear "failure" rather than the success that follows learning from failure; they may hear any critique as an unwelcomed assault on the University itself.

Groundwork for a thematically organized, yearlong sequence of events had been laid in 2002, when Chancellor Nancy Cantor, then in her second year at Illinois, attempted to channel some campus activity into a program dubbed "Exploring the Human Experience" (ETHE). Beginning in the spring semester, ETHE was intended to extend various group dialogues (some campus-sponsored, some not) initiated in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Spring 2002 ETHE series culminated with a commencement address delivered by former U.S. Poet Laureate Maya Angelou; in the following semester, a lecture by human rights activist and actor Mike Farrell inaugurated the 2002-03 ETHE series, themed "Beyond Differences?" According to a news release, the 2002-03 series was intended to "examine whether there are distinctly and commonly human experiences and concerns. Speakers and events will examine whether these shared experiences and concerns form a basis for communication, understanding and empathy in a pluralistic world or whether the fact that these experiences and concerns are expressed in countless different ways simply represents one more sign of irreconcilable diversity." In the course of these three semesters, ETHE challenged traditional approaches to campus programming by coordinating undergraduate courses offered in a variety of disciplines with keynote events sponsored by the Office of the Chancellor or planned by units around campus. The subsequent *Brown* Jubilee Commemoration year extended Chancellor Cantor's effort to sustain cross-campus conversations about issues of pressing social significance that were relevant to the work of the university. At the same time, the sheer

size and number of commemoration-related events also dwarfed the scale of ETHE. Further, the *Brown* Commemoration placed more than an easily-abstracted issue (“differences”) before the campus and community: it named a specific historical event with material causes and consequences that could be traced, questioned, and argued; it sought to braid strands of campus dialogue much more tightly than did ETHE; most of all, by seeking to “renew the spirit of social justice,” it announced its intention of creating political change.

While ETHE had been overseen by an advisory committee with a faculty chair, it was decided that the *Brown* Commemoration required administrative leadership, though certainly faculty and staff were also part of the advisory team. Joining Chancellor Cantor in providing leadership for the commemoration were Susan Fowler, Dean of the College of Education from 2000-2006, and Thomas Ulen, Swanlund Professor in the College of Law and Director of the Illinois Program in Law and Economics. Given their administrative experience, both Fowler and Ulen were quite familiar with the challenges of programming events for audiences large and small, which is to say they knew that *Brown* events would be competing with hundreds of other activities scheduled throughout the 2003-04 academic year. They realized that such programming demanded a coherent vision for at least two reasons: first, to draw enough people to individual events to promote meaningful conversations and interactions; and second, to develop a loyal audience attending multiple events so that those conversations could incorporate—and be shaped by—the multiple perspectives on *Brown* that would emerge only over the course of the year.

Only at year’s end was the whole EBC research team able to discern the diverse perspectives that met in the *Brown* year. The team began to identify a major tension between what some speakers believed *Brown* had accomplished as a matter of law, and what others argued it had not. Paul, for example, remarked on the pride with which Cheryl Brown Henderson recited five major legal gains that can be ascribed to the decision that bears her father’s name, while also noting that Cheryl’s sister, Linda Brown Thompson, wondered aloud whether a better outcome might have been achieved had the NAACP first sued for equal funding of schools, and then only later for desegregation. The ethnographers also noticed that some speakers expressed hope about those efforts toward social justice that they believed *Brown* had catalyzed, while others spoke of their great disappointment at *Brown*’s failure to energize such efforts, or of their sense that no single legal decision could reasonably be expected to fuel a major social movement. Rene perceived these complex tensions in a number of venues, including a panel discussion jointly sponsored by student organizations in education and law. And the EBC team saw variations on all of these tensions played out at a College of Education-sponsored symposium on the black-white achievement gap in Champaign and Urbana schools.

These tensions are also visible in interviews of Cantor, Fowler, and Ulen. While it cannot be said that they disagreed with one another, to be sure, each “producer” ventured several theories accounting for *Brown*’s significance. Distinct central tendencies in each producer’s assessments of *Brown*’s promise correlated with differing expectations for the commemoration itself. Fowler saw *Brown*’s promise as a mandate for equality that has not been fully realized in all publicly supported domains including the realm with which she is most familiar—education. But for Ulen, the decision’s promise was in fact its great achievement: because it outlawed the racial segregation of public accommodations by

overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson*, it was a moment of considerable import in the realm of his expertise—law. Interestingly, Nancy Cantor’s assessment of *Brown*’s promise incorporated both Fowler’s and Ulen’s evaluations of *Brown*’s legacy. While she acknowledged the legal and social values of the decision, she took pride in the part played by her scholarly domain—social psychology—in moving the justices to a unanimous decision. She also recognized that desegregation in the wake of *Brown*’s mandate has not produced the practical justice imagined by those who pressed the court to decide for the *Brown* plaintiffs, in part because social institutions, including universities, are slow to change.

#### **4.1.1 Dean Susan Fowler**

Susan Fowler claimed a personal stake in the *Brown* decision. She earned her teaching certification in 1974, and her first assignment was in a preschool class of special needs children. As Nicole reported, it disturbed Fowler that “by the age of seven or eight years old, children with special needs were forced to enter residential programs at state hospitals, having to live without their families if they wanted to receive more education.” Fowler continued: “I guess I had a social justice pulse in me at that time because I can conceive of nothing worse than children not being able to go to their neighborhood school.” Two years after she began teaching, Public Law 94-142 was enacted, mandating that students with a variety of special needs should have access to appropriate education: this law “had a direct impact on me,” Fowler said, “because I was teaching those kids, and I no longer had to send them away to a state residential program for them to go on into school.” Reflecting on her own studies in developmental psychology and special education, Fowler described how she came to understand that the *Brown* decision provided a foundation for all subsequent civil rights law insofar as it “said that it was discriminatory to provide any kind of separate accommodations or separate educational arrangements, whether it was for children with disabilities or for girls who were athletic.” Convinced that *Brown* still holds the potential to transform, Fowler hoped the year-long commemoration engaging both campus and community could produce, among other things, greater diversity in the U of I student body, and a more productive relationship between the campus and the schools, both in Champaign-Urbana and in Chicago. To promote this dialogue on campus, Fowler believed, it would be necessary to “take it out of the historical context of 1954 and make sure that it was still a live, active, vibrant message that impacts the way we live today and that still needs to be understood so that it can be protected. And you know, it worked really well, because by painting a broad stroke, almost all of the colleges got interested and involved. It wasn’t restricted to Education and Law. . . . We wanted really high involvement across campus.” She told Nicole that since she attended school before enactment of Title IX, which mandated gender equality in college athletics, she had not imagined participating in intercollegiate athletics, while today’s young women come to college asking about athletic scholarships. Fowler thus felt that organizers “should make sure that Title IX is represented, because that’s a relevant issue for kids on campus.” She wanted to bring *Brown* alive because she sensed that students today, born after the *Brown* decision and much of the civil rights legislation for which it laid the foundation, take hard-won achievements for granted. “But if you lived before the norm,” she observed, “you could really see what a difference it makes.” In the current campus climate, for example, she hoped students would appreciate

the value of *Brown* to efforts such as those seeking equal rights for gay, bisexual, and lesbian students.

Fowler evaluated the effort to take the *Brown* Commemoration to the local community, and judged it a mixed success. On the one hand, there had been good turnout from the community at the “Celebration of Diversity” reception held at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in November. Another event had succeeded in gathering College of Education faculty members and Urbana schoolteachers. She also took pride and pleasure in remembering the centerpiece of the College of Education’s participation in the *Brown* Commemoration, “The Achievement Gap in Champaign-Urbana: The Unfinished Agenda of *Brown*,” a two-day symposium in January that was well-attended by senior administrators from both local school districts. On the other hand, Fowler was disappointed by the failure of an off-campus film series meant to promote dialogue among members of the university and local communities. Looking back on the year’s events, Fowler gave the following summary of her impressions: “I guess . . . I would say that it hasn’t been as successful as I might have hoped for community involvement at this point in time, but a lot of projects are still ongoing, and I think that we’ll have outcomes, products in the next year, year and a half, that still could be very much shared with the community ... and ... that hopefully will still have an impact.”

Reflecting on this portion of the interview in her field notes, Nicole appreciated Fowler’s balanced evaluation: “Because I have heard several people speak about the community’s dissatisfaction with the level of involvement and interaction between the local community and the university,” she wrote, “I’m glad that Susan, while presenting the University efforts put forth to engage the community, does acknowledge that community involvement and/or engagement with the University has not been entirely successful and that there is at least an intention to try and strengthen the relationship between the local school districts/community and the University community.” Nicole went on to wonder, “How might the community be better engaged? How has the community tried to engage the university, or has it, does it want to, why or why not?” *Brown* participants, and our team’s ethnographers, wrestled with these questions throughout the *Brown* ethnography project. The student members of our team noted that organizers appeared frustrated whenever community attendance at public events was sparse, and they likewise observed frustration among community members when campus events that were supposed to connect with local concerns did not. It might be tempting to lump these frustrations into a major critique of the commemoration. Instead, the *Brown* ethnography team concluded that frustration, like friction, only occurs when two entities are in contact, and such contact—when absence of contact is the norm—should not be ignored or slighted. If commemoration events did not prompt a full dialogue between members of the university and local communities, perhaps the contact it did promote, if nurtured with care, can mature into the sort of dialogue that Fowler and the other *Brown* producers so keenly desired.

Fowler echoed her organizing partners’ hopes that effects from the *Brown* Commemoration would reverberate in dialogue and practice throughout the university well into the future. In that way—and maybe only that way—concern for racial and ethnic diversity on campus might become the norm, to borrow her terms. Unfortunately, that concern cannot be taken for granted. As she thought about books on *Brown* she might ask first year students to read, she said they “brought back the injustices and what a

struggle it has been and how it is still a struggle, it is not over. The promise of *Brown* was not achieved.” With disappointment, she observed that “there are other ways to segregate, by economics, languages. In the inner-city Chicago, many schools are 100 percent minority.” In view of persistent (but legal) segregation in the schools, Fowler asserted that “we need far more diverse ways of assessing or evaluating not competence for college, but promise for college, or we’ll have a very narrow group of people admitted.” She cited with pride a campus goal to increase minority student enrollment in 2004-05 by 20 percent over 2003-04, and expressed hope that students will recognize the danger of sliding back to a time when it was not the “norm” to value knowing people different than themselves across the spectrum of race, language, values, and religion. Unfortunately, the campus did not realize its goal for minority student admission, and in fact enrolled fewer students of color than the year before. The decrease for African American students was estimated to be 32 percent, and Latino enrollment also fell. In light of these unhappy circumstances, a true test of the *Brown* Commemoration’s efficacy will be to see if dialogues begun then can sustain inquiry into the value of racial and ethnic diversity on our campus.

#### **4.1.2 Professor Thomas Ulen**

Whereas Susan Fowler’s academic career in special education owes much to legal decisions and legislation predicated on *Brown*, Thomas Ulen’s career in legal education has, until recently, been little affected by the decision. In an interview, he told Teresa that “in my naïve way I thought that of course there was some resistance to the integration of public schools after 1954, but that it certainly was one bridge we had crossed and were not going to have to go back across and we could turn our attention to other things.” Although he said his opinion of *Brown* as legal precedent had not changed substantively over the years, recent analysis of the decision’s legacy left him “really stunned at the extent to which I now see a pattern of things having occurred since 1954 and up to the present that has been very instructive.... I’ve been struck by the fact...that there is a great deal of unfinished business.” Despite this awareness, Ulen stressed that he didn’t “feel pessimistic” about what must be accomplished, although “there has been at various points in the year a tone of pessimism that I must say I find discouraging about the advances that have occurred since 1954.” In contrast, Ulen reflected, “I must say I feel mildly—well not mildly, more than mildly—optimistic about the future. I think we’ve made great strides. It doesn’t mean that all the problems are behind us, but we’ve made great strides. . . I think a proper way to look at this is: we’ve accomplished a great deal in fifty years, we had a 300-year history before us, before *Brown*, of racial slavery and hatred and mistrust and discrimination, and the advances we’ve made in fifty years over that 300 years have been fairly substantial. I wish I were going to be around fifty years from now to see the further advances that are no doubt going to be made.”

Ulen’s response to the *Brown* decision reflects his interest in scientifically testing the validity of legal theories and the decisions based on them. In a recent law review article, Ulen wrote that “the theory now gaining favor in the legal academy is less jurisprudential and more like the theories that characterize the natural and other social sciences. The newer theorizing in law tends to make predictions about the real-world consequences of legal rules and standards. Although these newer legal theories must be logically coherent and consistent, ultimately their worth turns on the extent to which they are borne out by careful empirical and experimental work” (“A Nobel Prize in Legal Science” [2003], p.



878). This empirical approach provides a key to understanding Ulen's thinking about the *Brown* Commemoration. As he explained to Teresa, the decision established unequivocally that "racially segregated schools, and by implication racially segregated everything, is inherently unequal. There is no justification for it. That's the promise." Thus, where it can be shown empirically that public policy produces racial segregation, the law should intervene to ensure that *Brown*'s promise is fulfilled. But like any legal decision, *Brown*'s scope is necessarily limited: the racial "hatred and mistrust and discrimination" Ulen spoke of manifest themselves in ways not subject to legal discipline. Thus, commemorating *Brown* necessitates thinking about which successes and failures can clearly be attributed to it, and which result from forces untouched by *Brown*'s mandate. Even when Ulen disagreed with the "tone of pessimism" sometimes attached to descriptions of the decision's efficacy, however, he called the commemoration of the decision "a great experience."

When Ulen first began planning the commemoration, he imagined that it had "limitless potential" to spark conversations lasting far beyond the academic year, but he observed, while talking with Teresa, that at the outset he and Fowler did not know how this potential would be realized. At first, they imagined that the organizing committee would be "huge," perhaps "thirty or forty people across campus." Then Ulen and Fowler confronted reality: They realized that "it's tough enough to get five people to come to a meeting; given people's busy schedules, it was impossible to conceive of getting thirty together repeatedly to do things." While two undergraduate students were originally invited to be committee members, conflicts in schedules prevented their participation; the committee did not seek other undergraduates as replacements after these conflicts became apparent. Instead, the Chancellor appointed a somewhat smaller committee, meetings commenced, and almost all the general outlines of the *Brown* Commemoration, according to Ulen, were "thought up" by the committee. In one of their most important actions, the committee decided to issue a request for proposals for *Brown*-related programming that circulated campus-wide and in the surrounding Champaign-Urbana community. The committee then evaluated the resulting bids for programming, and funded those deemed most likely to attract substantial and broad-ranging audiences at a reasonable cost.

When asked which *Brown* events he considered most successful, Ulen answered that one of the "most marvelous" events he attended was "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A History of the UNCF and its Advertising Campaign." Organized by Jason Chambers, an assistant professor of advertising, this exhibition, available throughout April 2004 at the Verde Gallery in Champaign, and thus readily accessible to community members, included art and copy from the Ad Council's campaign on behalf of the United Negro College Fund. Ulen also mentioned favorably the "Reading *Brown*" series at the University YMCA, which featured appearances by authors of significant books on the *Brown* decision and, more generally, civil rights. The series first featured Peter Irons, author of *Jim Crow's Children*, whose book played an important role in drawing students to the commemoration even though it was the centerpiece of the one *Brown* activity not proposed by the committee or respondents to its call for proposals. Provost Richard Herman had suggested that all first-year students should read a book related to *Brown*; liking the idea, the committee read six or seven books on *Brown*. It finally recommended three books to Herman: Irons' scholarly monograph, Melba Beals' memoir *Warriors Don't Cry*, and Colson Whitehead's novel *The Intuitionist*. Ulen had liked all three

books, and regretted that for logistical reasons Herman's selection, *Jim Crow's Children*, could only go to students in the Campus Honors Program and residents of the Unit One Living and Learning Community.

Ulen had few other regrets about planning for the year. Although he wished that the committee could have funded a monument marking the commemoration and a reenactment of arguments in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the decision *Brown* overturned, he had no quarrels with the projects that were funded. In his estimation, "the projects really ran themselves." He judged that the events he observed were well attended, especially when he took faculty members' research and teaching loads into consideration, but also admitted to wishing he had seen more "townspeople" at events throughout the year, and attributed sometimes-anemic community participation to the reluctance of local residents to venture into unfamiliar territory. All the same, he remained certain that others shared his good fortune in meeting "new people from both the campus and the greater community"; articulating a vision shared with Nancy Cantor, he called the commemoration year a truly "heightening experience" from which "joint work across campus disciplines" might arise.

Ulen credited Cantor with bringing "an extraordinary degree of enthusiasm to the issues of diversity" throughout the year. When Teresa asked him how he thought diversity initiatives like the *Brown* year would fare after Cantor's departure, Ulen, who chaired the committee that recommended Cantor's hiring to the chancellorship, was circumspect: "It is not that her successor's view of diversity will be any less strong; it may just be less central to that person's goals as a chancellor." He told Teresa that he does not think it possible for the campus to weaken its commitment to diversity issues, since he could not think of anyone fit for institutional leadership "who is not committed to diversity and to excellence" just as Cantor was. By linking excellence and diversity, Ulen's response reveals an important assumption: "diversity" and "excellence" are inextricably bound together in assessments of the university. To this point, we add the observation that "diversity," like "excellence," can mean many things. On one level, when used as a descriptor of the current national population, the word is a social fact. When used in other contexts, the word acts as code for social legislation such as affirmative action. Within a certain university context, it speaks to the need to recruit women and people of color to faculty ranks and to the student body—and to retain those it recruits. In this context, in at least some quarters within the university, the relationship between excellence and diversity is most likely to be disputed.

#### **4.1.3 Chancellor Nancy Cantor**

When President James Stukel announced in April 2001 that Nancy Cantor would become the U of I's seventh chancellor, he proclaimed that she had "everything that the UI at Urbana-Champaign, one of the world's great public universities, deserves." He added that "[s]he has star power in her own discipline of psychology. She is an experienced academic leader at two great—and quite different—American universities. She understands the core values of the campus and the overriding ethos of excellence. Finally, she is enthusiastic, has high energy and understands the commitments we make to our many constituents—from students to taxpayers, from alums to legislators. She has it all." Even though the campus community would need time to unpack the complete meaning of Stukel's statement, Cantor was no cipher. At the time of Stukel's announcement, she was completing her fourth year as Provost at the University of

Michigan, where then-President Lee Bollinger could speak with precision about her accomplishments: “Nancy has provided the framework and support for important initiatives in undergraduate education, and interdisciplinary scholarship and research. . . . She is an influential leader in higher education nationally, speaking eloquently and with authority on a range of issues, from graduate education to diversity and gender equity.” With even greater precision, an article in Michigan’s *University Record* named seven areas in which Cantor “made lasting contributions” as Provost, among them interdisciplinarity, diversity, and the provision of “public goods”; it noted her ability to combine art, music, archives, courses, performance programs, and the like to facilitate both scholarly collaboration and outreach to the community beyond campus. This assessment of Cantor’s legacy at Michigan names all of the elements visible in her plan for the year-long Jubilee Commemoration at the U of I.

During an interview with the entire EBC research team, Cantor disclosed that “my own personal/chancellor’s goals for the *Brown* Commemoration—and those things are intersecting but not entirely overlapping—were really first and foremost to galvanize the campus in its positions to the broader society, by reflecting back on where it is on issues of race in America.” Further, by invoking the “spirit of social justice,” Cantor meant to spur inquiry into efforts to redress the inequalities outlawed by *Brown*. When Nicole asked her why the *Brown* decision was a good point of departure for discussing racial and ethnic diversity on campus, Cantor replied that *Brown* “is important as much for what hasn’t happened as for what did happen. . . . No one could possibly look at American society now and say . . . things are the same as they were fifty years ago, but at the same time you could not look and say that the promise of *Brown* has been kept.” In short, it was the “unsettling but important combination of hope and disappointment” evoked by *Brown* that Cantor wanted the campus and the local community to explore together in 2003-04.

Illinois was hardly alone in taking up *Brown*’s double provocation. As Cantor traveled the country giving speeches on her vision of American higher education’s future, she observed that many campuses had planned activities commemorating *Brown*, most of them organized by one academic discipline or another. If these commemorations were “all very different on different campuses,” they held in common a “sense of undone work. Different people see different messages in *Brown*, but everybody seems to feel that it’s important to mark it not because it happened, but because of what hasn’t happened.” The Jubilee Commemoration at the U of I, however, stood in marked contrast to the modest programming Cantor encountered elsewhere. The Rockefeller Foundation’s national survey of *Brown*-related activities shows a range of one-day symposia (Duke University), multi-day conferences (New York University and the University of Kansas), and semester-long observances (University of Michigan’s School of Literature, Science, and the Arts). Nothing, however, approached the dimensions of the U of I’s commemoration. Asked why she charged the planning committee to assemble a year-long series of high-profile events, Cantor explained that “there was a deliberate attempt to make it an onslaught because I personally did not see that it would get any attention unless . . . [it was] . . . so forceful.”

Although she couched the need for an “onslaught” as a personal assessment, it was also quite clearly a professional one. Cantor’s work in social psychology provides a rationale for the scale of the commemoration. As a psychologist, she subscribes to the

theory that people are most likely to change their attitudes about others—and, crucially, their behavior toward them—when opportunities to interact with those others are sustained and structured. Cantor has written (with coauthor Sabrina Zirkel) that “creating multicultural education environments that promote successful outcomes for all students requires thoughtful planning....It...does not mean providing, laissez-faire, a setting in which students of various ethnic backgrounds can meet and interact on their own. Instead, the best multicultural learning environments are ones in which administrators and faculty encourage and arrange interaction in a variety of planful ways—from organizing campus dialogs to creating projects for students to work on together” (“50 Years After *Brown v. Board of Education*,” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2004, p. 11). As Cantor would doubtless hasten to acknowledge, arranging interaction in “planful ways” may cost more than any individual unit on campus is willing or able to pay. Therefore, as Cantor has argued at least since her days as Michigan’s provost, campus administrators must commit significant resources to providing “public goods” that can benefit many campus interests at once. In fact, during the *Brown* year, Cantor enlarged this position, arguing in a number of speeches that universities themselves “have a rare and critical role to play as a public good”; as “centers of intellectual diversity,” they must remain sufficiently “connected to the concerns of the day” to be able to engage in “culture-changing work” (“Moving Together: The Arts in Higher Education,” University of Maryland, October 2003).

What culture-changing work did the chancellor imagine the *Brown* Commemoration could accomplish on campus? In a word, “dialogue”: Cantor wanted to foster new conversations. She mentioned, as an example, a dialogue on affirmative action sparked by the appearance of Christopher Edley Jr., who participated in the Champaign County Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration. She noted that the “College Republicans had been on my tail to do something after Chris’s speech,” and she was pleased to see that they had been motivated to set up a forum on the subject of affirmative action, which we describe later in this chapter. She stressed, however, that effective campus dialogues on diversity issues must be configured to promote “self-reflection and social reflection joined in a context that’s sustained.” A one-night debate on affirmative action, while important, would need to lead to other, larger events to produce lasting change. Thus, even as Cantor planned her departure to Syracuse University, she worked with others to secure three efforts that would inherit and extend the *Brown* Commemoration mandate for dialogue: the Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society (CDMS); Intersections, an undergraduate living-learning community; and three student cultural houses—the African American Cultural Program, La Casa Cultural Latina, and the Native American House. It was Cantor’s intention for CDMS, with a grant from the Ford Foundation, to “document the difference diversity makes” on a campus like the U of I. Under the Ford grant, one object of study would be Intersections, modeled on the inter-group dialogue initiative pioneered at University of Michigan, which Cantor called “absolutely critical as an experiment in integration—and all the conflict and community that comes with that.” As for the cultural houses, Cantor hoped that students of color had experienced the *Brown* Commemoration as a “wake-up call” signaling that diversity was being taken seriously across campus, and that the time had come for the cultural houses to enter dialogue on matters of common concern. Nicole asked Cantor why all three initiatives directly or indirectly involved students. “Because,” she answered, “you’re the ones who carry forth

from the university with the capacity to transform the disappointments of *Brown* into something better.”

Cantor also believed the *Brown* Commemoration could improve university-community relations. During her three-year tenure at Illinois, she noted, she had learned to appreciate “how delicate the relationships are between the university and its community of color surrounding it.” Thus, it was important for her, as chancellor, in conjunction with the campus, “to make a statement . . . that opens the campus” to surrounding communities of color “in a way that says we’re examining ourselves, we want to examine ourselves in relation to history and to you” and “we want you to come on campus” to be part of that extended exercise. Cantor realized that whatever the *Brown* Commemoration was to become for the local African American community, it had to go far beyond the annual Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration that had become “very ritualized around the Sunday event” at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts.

In light of all Cantor had said about her aims for the *Brown* Commemoration, Nicole asked her to name the year’s high and low points. She identified the high point easily: “most poignant” was the fact that commemoration activities gave voice to concerns about access and achievement long held by the local African American and Latino/a communities, concerns that could be addressed between students on campus and their elders in Champaign and Urbana. Community members had told her throughout the year that “just knowing that *Brown* was going on” was important. The low point came to her easily, too. It was the “Chief Illiniwek” controversy, which exerted “such a stranglehold on things.” As Cantor put it, “One couldn’t in any very authentic way say that the *Brown* year included a really thorough examination of our history of discrimination or lack of inclusion with respect to Native Americans.” But then she added, “It’s not the Chief qua Chief . . . it’s that there’s so much tension around what would happen if we talked about the Chief, if you really tried to change. It’s almost like the Chief is there but not there. It sometimes emerges in questions or sometimes even in statements of speakers.” She remarked that many visiting speakers would talk about this university symbol before taking the stage, but few would address it at the podium. It pained Cantor that “my very being here is surrounded by the question” of whether a dialogue on the Chief is possible. Ironically, on the very day the EBC research team interviewed Cantor, the student newspaper at Syracuse University had called to ask her whether she was responsible for the recent change of its campus athletics moniker from “Orangemen” to “Orange.” No, she told the reporter, despite rumors that she was waging a campaign against “politically incorrect” athletics mascots, it was in truth Nike—citing market research and leveraging its contractual relationship with the men’s basketball program—that had insisted upon the change.

To what extent these high and low points will matter in the *Brown* Commemoration’s legacy, Cantor declined to say because, in her view, meaningful institutional and individual change happens incrementally, not by way of “a big bang.” Because of this, an institution cannot effectively assess change as it is happening. Its members must wait and reflect, and even then they may never know for certain what has happened, or why. “This may sound self-serving or rationalizing,” Cantor said, “but I’m going to be happy with subliminal kinds of impacts. If one of our graduates goes to New York City years from now and rides the subway and sees a poster on *Brown*, it will click with them and they can start to make connections to the fact that there was a

commemoration at his alma mater.” If Cantor was sure of anything regarding the commemoration’s legacy, it was that such fleeting moments of reflection—repeated at random through the years and wherever Illinois alumni go—are worth all of the money, time, and effort the commemoration required.

## **4.2 The Next Generation**

How can historical understandings and cultural exposure lead citizens and government to fulfill the promise of *Brown* and build a just interracial future? Because this question became a clear reference point, and its emphasis on the future put students at the heart of the hopes and dreams of the *Brown* year, we turn now to the complex relationship of students to the university’s grand effort to move citizens of all generations to consider, as the mission statement put it, “the spirit of social justice that spurred such commitment to this important cause a half-century ago with the *Brown* court case.” In this section, we examine how the university—through lectures, events, seminars, performances, and visiting scholars—summoned student participants. We emphasize that these events, in the spirit of the *Brown* year, called upon people to act both inside and outside the university. Many speakers and performers enjoined people, particularly students, to renew and re-enact the desire for justice that informed the many U.S. citizens who helped bring the *Brown* case and the civil rights movement to fruition. Although we joined many others in our disappointment at the extent of student presence in *Brown*, those students who both actively participated in and acted on *Brown*, small as their number may have been, encouraged us. In the subsections that follow, we ask why and how some students were effectively called to events while others were not. We then describe some of the experiences and actions of those students who did commit to *Brown*.

### **4.2.1 Summoning Students**

Event organizers and participants invited students in particular to carry on the social justice work that culminated in *Brown*. The ethnographers reported that *Brown* year student audiences were defined in contradictory ways: their generation was both inactive on civil rights issues, and capable of changing the future. These definitional differences led to two modes of address: the first, assuming the current generation was politically inactive, apathetic, or disaffected, charged it with forsaking its social responsibility; the second, believing its student audience was the hope of the future and that it desired justice, called it the beacon for change. In some events, speakers combined both modes of address: on those occasions, students would first hear that they were guilty of shrugging off the mantle of history and forgetting the struggles of the past, and then hear exhortations to right injustices of the present and future.

When Paul Finkelman listed the absurdities of the pre-*Brown* color line in the United States, as we described in the first chapter, he not only acknowledged the positive developments of the past fifty years, but also attended to *Brown*’s unfulfilled promises. He attributed this incompleteness, in part, to the political apathy of the populace, and criticized the present student generation for not voting in great numbers. Nicole, among others, took exception to this classification. She wrote, “From the facial expressions in the crowd, it appears as if audience members are insulted by the speaker’s presumption of their lack of political involvement. I remember one college student woman who looked

very upset and looked at the older woman next to her (I assume her mother). The woman patted her on the back as if to calm her down.”

This episode, and Nicole’s interpretation of it, indicates that many contemporary students do not perceive themselves as politically passive. Because racial divisions, as Teresa remarked in a discussion of Finkelman’s lecture, are less visible than they were fifty years ago, fewer students perceive racism as a problem. Those students who do see the need to address racial problems, meanwhile, face the difficult task of developing correspondingly nuanced representations of racial inequality so others can see the need for action. This difficulty, along with the lack of public action on racial issues in the contemporary U.S., entered students’ assessments of their political identities, and they became angry when Finkelman charged them with disinterest in the politics of race. He did summon the students to action, but framing this summons within an injunction to shake off political apathy failed to persuade some of the students attending his lecture.

Reverend Ben Cox, whom we introduced in the prior chapter, also addressed the issue of politically uninvolved students. In a freewheeling question and answer discussion at Allen Hall, he directed himself to the criticisms that many young people make of the U.S. social order. When he said, “I don’t feel that you can complain if you don’t vote,” his audience reacted. Teresa described the moment in her fieldnotes: “Everyone, besides me, has stopped taking notes. Everyone is very quiet and attentive and questions keep coming. People are internalizing what he is saying. There are many ‘umm hmms’ and nods. Many heads are resting on hands, facing Ben.” Teresa believed these exchanges were crucial, and wrote down Reverend Cox’s culminating remark: “‘Excuse me, but what pisses me off . . .’ he continues, ‘these [students] who are complaining, but they have Suburbans, they go home to the suburbs. It’s not all about the ‘bling bling’ . . . How do I reach these people? Keep asking, keep asking.’” This appeal to continue questioning reached students, despite the implied criticism of those who might come from the suburban milieu that Cox had defined as indifferent to racial issues. Teresa reported that Reverend Cox’s entreaties held sway because students admired the chances he took in fighting for civil rights. Because he had risked life and limb as one of the initial Freedom Riders, students granted legitimacy to his criticisms of them. In the same way, many students, and other *Brown* participants, noted that they most enjoyed hearing the narratives of people who had been on the front lines of civil rights struggles. All our student ethnographers, and many of the students with whom they talked informally or interviewed formally, reported that they gave more credence to the words of people who had been actively involved, and took their criticisms and their calls to action more seriously. This event led us to wonder whether the strategies of inspiration and motivation, which Cox used well, have long-lasting effects, particularly because his humorous and inviting persona contrasts with stereotypes of standard academic talk. Cox concluded the evening event, for example, as a preacher does, by calling on his audience to “march forward, holding hands with anyone marching in the same direction.” Teresa ended her own entry on the event with a comment on Cox’s charisma: “You can tell by the way he speaks that he is an activist. He is a motivational speaker of sorts. I left there feeling inspired and motivated to work towards a better world.”

This report suggested, in the first chapter, that undergraduate students wanted something more from *Brown* events than “let’s sit down in a lecture and be lectured to,” as Nneka Dudley put it. This charismatic talk ranged in register from the colloquial

(“what pisses me off”) to the inspirational (“march forward”), as Cox modeled an appealing alternative. Positive student response to Cox and other veterans of the civil rights movement reminds us that emotional discourse can provide access to learning, the inspiration to “renew the spirit of social justice,” and the desire to act on that inspiration, more effectively than a highly specialized academic talk. Some readers might protest that the narratives of Freedom Riders and other activists, in which the speaker’s very presence suggests that the travails of jail time and beatings have been overcome, represent only another version of the well-worn American success story insisting that hard work and a pure heart inevitably prevail. In this view, the stories told by Cox, Beals, and others become commodities—heartwarming narratives to be consumed, enjoyed, and forgotten. But the stories and descriptions that follow in this chapter suggest that students not only appreciated but demanded intellectual substance in conjunction with emotional appeals, and that speakers need not embody the past of the civil rights movement to make effective emotional calls on their audiences.

Many invitations to students encouraged them to take up the mantle of *Brown* without accusing them of apathy and inaction. Chancellor Cantor called upon students to engage *Brown* in her welcoming remarks to the 2003 New Student Convocation, for example, and the convocation’s featured speaker, Professor Kal Alston, Professor of Educational Policy Studies and Director of the Gender and Women’s Studies Program, explicitly invited students to take up the discourses and mission of *Brown v. Board of Education*. She told the assembled audience of students, faculty, and administrators: “You are the beneficiaries of an ongoing struggle. You are entitled to be participants in the next phase of America’s attempts to include all her sons and daughters; you are responsible for pushing forth her democratic dreams.” While Professor Alston situated incoming students in historical struggles for social justice, she did not racially mark them; instead, she assumed that all students share the inheritance of the *Brown* decision and that all of them have a responsibility to work in its spirit. Throughout the year, many *Brown* Commemoration speakers tried to stir similar commitments to active citizenship. But such obligations are complex. Calls to civic action, like those issued by Professor Finkelman and Reverend Cox, implied understandings of racial, ethnic, class, and political identity with which not every audience member identified. Participants in such events questioned these assumptions: while they sometimes made these questions known through sustained public debate, student participants more often expressed disagreement through the kind of body language that Nicole reported during the Finkelman event.

Speakers and performers who addressed local relations of race and diversity often summoned participants differently than did those who emphasized national or state of Illinois perspectives. To the extent that they focused on students’ more concrete circumstances, they elicited more spirited and collegial engagements. In these encounters, speakers imagined that young people had more engagement with culturally, racially, and socially different others than their elders, and that younger people were more committed to maintaining and furthering this experience. Put another way, presenters at such events assumed that the student participants desired to continue down the road to diversity in their personal and institutional lives.

As an example, when Professor Blannie Bowen spoke with student leaders of the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences, he roused them to think about where diversity stands a half-century after *Brown* by telling stories about the



segregated society in which he grew up, and then contrasting his experience to the unexpected tastes of young people he knows and the contemporary diversity of cultural products. He told of black students in his university's college of agriculture who love country and western music and wear cowboy hats, and he noted that young people have penetrated cultural boundaries in surprising ways: Eminem has topped rap charts, Tiger Woods is the world's best-known and top-ranked golfer, and Yao Ming from China was the National Basketball Association's top draft pick. He then posed a rhetorical question to the student leaders, "Why expand your horizons?" This was his answer: "You can improve your education and employment opportunities, and . . . avoiding stereotypes is the biggest reason to expand your horizons." Professor Bowen suggested concrete ways in which students could continue the spirit of *Brown*: they could try new foods and music, meet different individuals, have a pen pal from the inner city, travel, or host an international student through 4H or other clubs. He also suggested, as Rene wrote, "Be real. Don't make stereotypes. Focus on your strengths and expand your horizons. What next: Go to assimilation activities with group bonding." At this point, Rene made an insertion in her notes: "My roommate always encourages me to come with her to African American clubs and events."

Having offered these suggestions, Professor Bowen then reflected on the difficulty of enacting them. He cited a newspaper article published a few days before his talk that described whites moving to the suburbs as the result of "wanting the best for their kids." This juxtaposition—the need for diversity and communication across it, combined with the social fact of continuing segregation—evoked an impassioned response from the student participants. Rene took nearly verbatim notes from the conversation that followed, and we reproduce some of these exchanges here (the racial/ethnic designations invoked below are from Rene's fieldnotes):

Black woman: Even here the University of Illinois, the organizations are segregated. Few minorities participate in clubs that are not just for minorities mainly. In my undergrad at North Carolina A&T, a historically black college, there were many clubs for me to join, and I felt comfortable. Here I feel uncomfortable going to different clubs. They were not accommodating and I felt awkward . . .

Black man: I am a senior in food science. How can we diversify the faculty? What steps can we take to get minorities in teaching positions in Ag and in all areas?

Bowen: We have to face reality. Right now it is about supply and demand. There are not a lot of people of color . . .

Black woman: Concerning comfort zone, minorities are always outside their comfort zone. Majorities are unwilling to step out. Everyone stays in their own little groups for assignments. It is the same with organizations. None of the majority students is willing to step out of their comfort zone. I am the only African American in Ag Engineering on the campus and perhaps throughout the country.

Bowen: Invite different people to go out. Talk to your professors.

Latina woman: Since it is a big university, you don't get to interact with your classmates. Sometimes, I like animals more than people because people cause too much trauma.

Bowen: I agree! (The audience laughs.) I think professors need more ice breakers to get people to interact.

Black woman: Here on campus everything is so separated. There is the regular homecoming and then the African American homecoming. Today I was walking on the quad, and this white girl was passing out flyers. She passed them out to the white girls ahead of me, but she did not give me one. [Rene enters an aside in her notes: “How sad\! What was the white girl thinking\? That the black girl wouldn’t be interested in her event\? Was it out of fear\? Or did she not want her to attend\?”] What can we do about this climate?

Bowen: You have to go to the smallest level. You shouldn’t say that you have a problem with the whole university when it boils down to smaller issues.

White woman: As a member of the majority, I feel like I should speak up. I was raised in Texas in a 40-percent Latino community. From a majority point of view, I knew Latinos so I felt comfortable around them. I went to Texas A&M University and was never around African Americans for my undergrad. I am so afraid to interact because I do not know the culture, and I am so afraid to step on toes. Being from the South, we tend to stick our toe in our mouth a lot (audience laughs, helps to relieve the tension). The problem is that we are so afraid of offending people and hurting someone’s feelings. I just want you to be my friend, not just because of my skin color.

Bowen: There is not an easy answer. I think that the fear factor in ethnicity and race goes way up while other religions and circumstances don’t elicit the same response. All it takes is initiative. If you are the majority or minority, be proactive. At Ohio State, all my professors were white. . . . Be bipolar in your academic activities and other social activities. I was involved in church. You can be around people you want to be with. Look for other places besides the academic community.

The frankness, directness, and honesty of these exchanges, important in their own right, demonstrate the consequences of defining students, or calling them to action, in particular ways.

Speakers like Professor Finkelman and Reverend Cox, assuming that their audiences were politically passive and somewhat self-absorbed, prescribed large-scale duties such as voting to fulfill obligations described in moral and ethical terms. Rather than trust that their co-participants in the event were struggling with everyday issues of diversity and race on this campus—as we believe people do everywhere in this society, no matter whether they acknowledge or admit to this struggle—they presumed that these students needed to change their behavior and get involved in official establishment politics. Rather than accept the definitions of apathy and indifference assigned them, or follow these particular calls to action, students responded with silence. In short, the audience imagined by some speakers differed from students’ definitions of themselves as participants in political processes.

In contrast, Professor Bowen represented students as people who experienced diversity in their everyday cultural encounters, in their observations of celebrities, and in their consumption of cultural products. His statements on the value of diversity, as he summoned participants, resembled the pro-affirmative action discourse of *Grutter v. Bollinger*. He assumed that students who were energetically working to organize their lives and careers would necessarily encounter, negotiate, and value diversity. He

addressed their local contexts and brought daily experience and ethical dimensions to the presentation. Rather than push his idea of moral duty upon students, Professor Bowen defined ethical action as the effort to devise effective ways to communicate with others, and organize effective relations with others in their everyday lives. While he, like other speakers, characterized student participants as people who would brighten the future, Professor Bowen also recognized that they struggled to act ethically in the present world, where segregation and separation still prevailed. By situating the problem of segregation and flight to the suburbs in the context of people trying to act in the interest of their families, he made the call for student engagement immediate, urgent, recognizable, and accessible. In response, students with diverse identities talked openly with him and each other about their exclusions, ambiguities, and hurts. He made concrete suggestions for ameliorating the injuries of everyday experience and encouraged student participants to find practical and feasible solutions to the segregated areas of their lives. Importantly, he did not blame students for having areas in their lives that remained segregated. Instead, he understood that they had inherited a set of distorted social relations that he expected them to redress incrementally over time. By linking personal experiences to the structures of segregation, and by understanding that students had a prior stake in issues of diversity, Professor Bowen provoked honest and compelling discussion. In the process, even as he recognized difficulty and complexity, as academic standards compel, he also noted the importance of feelings and values, thus moving discourse beyond the usual university register.

#### **4.2.2 Students Connecting around Controversy**

In early February, a subcommittee of the campus College Republicans, motivated by a fall semester full of debates on diversity, racial justice, and the Chief Illiniwek controversy, organized an event entitled, “The Future of Affirmative Action: A Panel Discussion from Diverse Points of View.” This subcommittee, led by Billy Joe Mills, a sophomore political science major, approached Nate Allen, the voting student member of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees, and Chancellor Nancy Cantor for help in bringing their plan to fruition. The panel included two students—Billy represented the College Republicans, and Nneka Dudley represented the student chapter of the NAACP—and four faculty members. Professor Vernon Burton (History) served as the moderator; Professor William Trent (Educational Policy Studies) presented a pro-affirmative action position; a participant we will call only “Professor Emeritus” argued an anti-affirmative action position; and Professor Jim Nowlan (Political Science) propounded a middle course. In the following, we rely on Teresa’s fieldnotes for several purposes: as a record of what was said, as a record of emotional responses (including Teresa’s) to what was said, and as a platform for consideration of the event’s consequences. As it was a charged debate, everyone present did not share Teresa’s experience.

Professor Trent, who spoke first, relied on the social psychological studies of Kenneth Clark to describe the deleterious effects of segregation on children, both black and white, and then outlined the reasons why simple desegregation did not undo the personal, psychological, educational, and social damage committed in segregated educational institutions. He asked the audience to understand the difference between desegregation and integration, and defined the latter term as “the sharing, understanding, and accepting of other cultures, including cultures of color, as equal to one’s own.” After

citing research that demonstrated integration's benefits, he urged that discussions on integration and its value be placed on the public agenda at once because students of color and poor students on all educational levels were losing ground. In his view, affirmative action meant both righting past and present wrongs and institutionalizing integration.

Professor Emeritus, who followed, asserted that affirmative action was not necessary: In Teresa's paraphrase of his argument, "If African Americans were not getting into colleges, then it was because they were not trying hard enough, or they were not fit in the same way." He cited a few case studies that, he argued, revealed this affect. When Billy followed as the representative of the College Republicans, he took a middle ground. While he agreed with the goal of increasing diversity, he disagreed with the policy of affirmative action on the grounds that it shows preference for one race over another." He advocated instead the "affirmative access" plan adopted by the state of Texas in response to the *Hopwood* decision, which halted affirmative action policies in Texas's institutions of higher education. He argued in the written version of his presentation: "In order to create a more perfect and harmonized society, we must all first psychologically accept diverse backgrounds and thought. Once, then, we have achieved psychological integration, physical integration will follow. Affirmative action takes the reverse philosophy by trying to impose physical diversity by shortcutting the necessary and arduous step of psychological integration. The result might still be diversity. However, that diversity will be a cheap one. It will not be willingly accepted or appreciated.... It is evident today, after nearly forty years of affirmative action, that our society has not achieved psychological integration and harmony. Affirmative action purports to psychologically integrate society by producing an educated and affluent minority middle class, which is more likely to be accepted by the white community. Among many other things, I believe, it is safe to say that a racist is not logical. But, if that is so, why do we expect them to shed their racism simply because minorities are becoming more educated and more affluent?" (This passage was taken directly from his essay).

Whereas Professor Trent supported the findings of Dr. Clark, which state that policies that bring people together into common institutions can alleviate the psychological damages of segregation, Billy held the position that affirmative action policies had alienated whites and slowed integration. For this reason, Billy proposed that what he calls "psychological integration" must happen first. He claimed that Texas's affirmative access policy on higher education addressed the issue of psychological integration because members of all groups believed that achievement in high school, in this case finishing in the top ten percent of one's high school class, should be rewarded by a guaranteed space in a state university. He then presented data demonstrating that affirmative access policies maintained minority enrollment at Texas universities.

Professor Jim Nowlan followed Billy with a short presentation, during which he described his life growing up in an overwhelmingly white, rural town and the attitudes of people in such places. In her notes, Teresa summarized his position: "Like many people, he believes that integration is a good idea, but that any preference based on race undermines the true goal, equality." Nneka Dudley, who represented the affirmative action committee of the student chapter of the NAACP, started to present a case for affirmative action, but as Teresa wrote in her notes: "As she began to speak of the need for affirmative action from an African American student's perspective, she stopped. She

stopped and could not continue with her argument. She tried to start up again but could not get past the point where she had originally stopped. She seemed very nervous about speaking. (This was understandable since there were four speakers before her, three of whom were not in favor of affirmative action. I believe she must have felt tremendous pressure to give a strong argument for affirmative action that would overwhelm the arguments of the other panelists. I also think that she did not come into the speech anticipating this pressure and consequently did not think that she would have to write out her speech. Thus she was not able to go any further.)” Teresa’s marginal jottings on an earlier draft of this section include the phrases “very emotional” and “happened to me,” as well as this pointed question: “Why is this such a striking event to me?” In the margins, she began to parse out some of the meanings of the event: she noted the “burden of carrying the minority perspective, minority voice,” and observed that “in a society that white people have affirmative action every day, African Americans need it.”

Others in the audience, clearly enough, also responded emotionally. Unable to speak, Nneka asked Professor Burton to take over, promising that she would try to return to her points in the following question and answer session. Many of the questions in this contentious session were directed to Professor Emeritus. While responding, Professor Emeritus volunteered his perception “that African Americans, for the most part, always did poorly” in an introductory class he had taught in his field, and based this belief on his review of final grades in the course. Teresa recalls that he explained that after identifying names on the final grade roster that seemed self-evidently African American he subsequently discovered that students with those names had received lower grades. Teresa noted that questioners pushed Professor Emeritus to support his arguments with tangible evidence, because his remarks were the most controversial. She wrote: “As he was trying to validate some of his previous arguments, it became clear that his evidence was lacking.” She added: “He was obstinate with his answers. He hardly ever addressed the real issue of the questions being asked. It was as if he had a pre-planned list of responses, and when a person asked a question, he would just pick an answer no matter the relevance. . . . People were sighing, shaking their heads; their heads were in their hands. Hands shot up in the air after [Emeritus] dodged each question with an irrelevant answer. It eventually reached the point that Burton stood up and yelled over the audience for people to settle down.”

Teresa, who supports affirmative action policies, felt that Professor Emeritus’s comments about interpreting his class roster provided a glimpse of the murky criteria still governing some professors’ judgments of students of color. In her view, Professor Emeritus’s judgments were lacking strong evidentiary support beyond the anecdotal, were arbitrary, and therefore inappropriate within a university context. The EBC team finds a substantial difference between his comments and those grounded in academic research on race and racism—comments of the sort published by Professors Trent and Burton—and this difference has led us, in a passage below, to consider the limits of anecdotal exchange. Still, regardless of their character, Professor Emeritus’s comments did challenge the “liberal” register of university discourse on affirmative action.

Teresa, however, believed that official *Brown* Commemoration events, as well as unofficial ones that took up the commemoration’s themes, should have fostered discussion and the possibility of establishing working groups to address these issues in the future. She had hoped that such events might lead to students organizing some action

about the paucity of students of color on campus. Instead, she felt that Professor Emeritus's seeming vehemence, and what she perceived as his relative lack of social scientific data, had silenced some student participants like Nneka and herself. In her view, Professor Emeritus violated the spirit of inquiry and understanding that the *Brown* Commemoration attempted to create because he relied on characterizations that worked to prevent dialogue. She had learned to expect more from *Brown* Commemoration events, and, for her, the conclusion to the evening spoke to its shortcomings. If "business as usual" at the university has its failings, one of its great strengths resides in its insistence on the principles of scholarship demanding reasoned, researched evidence in support of claims. In an evening filled with polemical point-making and generalizations perilously close to stereotyping, she had witnessed instead a nightmarish version of what "business as usual"- unchecked racism on campus and in the classroom- might comprise at its worst.

We have come to think of this evening as one of the most significant events of the *Brown* year, even though the Brown Commemoration network did not organize it. If the panelists and their audience did not produce the discussion of diversity that Teresa had hoped for, and if its spirit may have contributed to the missing of an opportunity described above, the event did spur student action. The student organizers followed through on the debate by establishing "Dialogues on Diversity," a group of students, including Billy and Teresa, who had differing perspectives but committed themselves to planning future events on themes related to affirmative action and other cultural-political controversies. Inspired and excited by the debate, a second group of undergraduates formed a student debate organization in the fall semester of 2005 explicitly committed to organizing a series of panels on related issues.

Both students and faculty can learn from this panel about the organization of events around controversial issues. We note that student-organized events related to racial issues attracted the most student participation during the *Brown* Commemoration year. Such events fostered the development of student networks that have worked on relevant issues in the school year following the *Brown* Commemoration. Given this fact, it was unfortunate that there was little student participation in the planning of the *Brown* Commemoration. Students like Teresa and Nneka for example, were not satisfied with the debate as an event by itself. They appreciated that the debate mobilized student discussion for the evening, but they wanted more opportunity to reflect on the interactions that took place at the debate and other *Brown* events. To that end, it might have helped if students had worked with faculty in organizing these events. There is no doubt, however, that the year got students thinking, and pushed them to reflect upon cultural and political difference, the relations between equality and education, and the value of organizing events to interact with each other across their differences. It is clear that student engagement is most effective when students take charge of—or at least fully participate in—the organizing of events. Students, like the campus as a whole, may have difficulty when it comes to creating honest discussion among racial and ethnic groups. But their summoning of one another to engage with questions of racial justice deserves the admiration of the campus community and guides us to rethink the university's activities in this area.

### 4.3 Rethinking the University through *Brown*

In this section, we follow a number of people both in and beyond the university who took stock of the *Brown* Commemoration, the relationship between the university and its communities, and finally the university itself. The people we introduce here are neither students nor *Brown* producers, as we have previously defined them. As we stress throughout this report, to engage the *Brown* year is to engage a university's attempt to reckon with the diversity of its on-campus constituencies and with its off-campus neighbors. We highlight here the voices of those consumers of the *Brown* year who took to heart the university's stated interest in reaching out to the community. Our interlocutors below have much to say about the promise and failures of that ambition. Finally, we will observe how reflections on the *Brown* Commemoration and university-community relations go to the very core of the university's meaning and *raison d'être*. The reactions to *Brown* that follow are organized according to the primary object of reflection: the commemoration itself, the university as it relates to community, and finally the university at large.

#### 4.3.1 "You Can't Take Potential to the Bank"

In this section, we turn to our interlocutors' thoughts on the *Brown* Commemoration itself as a university project. As will become apparent, the commemoration represented a statement of university values and a decision about a particular use of university resources. Correspondingly, its diverse consumers had much to say about the venture. As a way of entering their thoughts, we recall a remark made by Nathaniel Banks that we included in chapter 1. The local "black community," he recalled, "didn't really see *Brown* as a major force because it took so long for it to take hold." While Nancy Cantor had imagined the Jubilee Commemoration would mark both the achievements and the disappointments engendered by the *Brown* decision, Banks's recollection suggests that local African Americans might not take the achievements as a given. At the same time, however, Banks credited Cantor with "making a person like me see the relevance of *Brown*."

A similar ambivalence appeared in the responses of John McKinn, a Maricopa Indian from the Gila River Indian Community who served as Assistant Director of the Native American House. Our ethnographers had been particularly interested in interviewing McKinn because they understood him to say, at an EBC Advisory Committee meeting in early December, that the *Brown* decision was but another in a long line of U.S. assimilationist policies that have been particularly devastating for Native Americans. In view of this history, the ethnographers imagined that McKinn had little motivation to involve himself and the Native American House in the commemoration. Instead, subsequent exchanges showed that McKinn's response to the commemoration was initially more complex than it first appeared, and that it continued to evolve in complexity over the course of the year.

That December conversation had led Rene to focus much of her first interview with McKinn on the forced assimilation of Native Americans. In this interview, McKinn indicated that he knew little about the commemoration events, and provided an abbreviated analysis of the *Brown* decision: "The government has long acted like a parent. Indians have been the wards of the state. I see *Brown* as assimilation." The statement suggests that the *Brown* decision opened the way to socializing Indian

populations, teaching and prescribing the ways of the majority culture. At a second interview, however, McKinn told Rene and Nicole that he had paid more attention to *Brown* Commemoration events in recent months. At that meeting, he said that he was pleasantly surprised by the number of events that were of interest to him, especially a number of events that featured Native American guests or topics. Interestingly, however, he expressed concern that the *Brown* Commemoration had stretched too far, perhaps, beyond the logical contours of the *Brown* legacy. In short, McKinn remained reticent about his own connection to events held in the name of *Brown*. After reading an earlier draft of this report, McKinn sought to clarify his thoughts in an e-mail message to EBC organizers. He wrote: "Though attitudes vary, I believe many American Indian communities (reservations) have preferred a separate but equal status with the U.S. government, a separation not based on race but defined by being a citizen of a recognized Indian community/nation (or, in some ideal sense, recognizing a tribes'/nations' status sovereign). . . . In essence, I think that when laws or policies are scripted that don't recognize Indians as sovereign nations, it is an attempt to cripple Indian self-determination, an attempt to gather natural resources, an attempt to assimilate Indians into dominant society so as to erase the federal government's trust responsibilities." McKinn concluded with an observation meant to situate his perspective among others represented in this report: "This idea of separate but equal (or sovereign) is not meant to be prescriptive for other communities, but to inform others of the position of Indian communities." To make this position more widely known, the American Indian Studies Program hoped to sponsor a symposium at which the tensions between integration and sovereignty illuminated locally during the *Brown* Commemoration could be explored. (McKinn told of these plans—and provided clarification of comments offered during his initial interview—both in e-mail, as previously noted, and at the EBC Advisory Committee meeting during which we solicited comments on an earlier draft of this report.)

While Banks and McKinn wondered about the broader implications of the university's decision to commemorate *Brown*, other observers questioned the particular aims and impact of the many events. Imani Bazzell, an African American community activist, program coordinator at Parkland College, and presenter at a *Brown* event, told Teresa that the *Brown* Commemoration did hold "enormous potential" to engage the community. Teresa described how she and Bazzell "both laughed wholeheartedly when Teresa asked her to recall which *Brown* Commemoration events she had attended and Bazzell responded, 'Girl, I don't even know!'" "She then detailed her near-weekly participation. At Bazzell's own presentation, "Why Black Folks Tend to Shout," part of the College of Education symposium, "Looking at the Champaign-Urbana Achievement Gap through Multiple Lenses," she told the nearly 40 people assembled, many of them from the community, that although she was listed on the program as being from Parkland College, the local community college, she in fact wears "many hats." Given her deep and wide-ranging commitment to the local community, Bazzell set a very high standard for what a university event in the name of race should bring to the community, and in her estimation the *Brown* year did not measure up to its potential. For Bazzell, the success or failure of the *Brown* Commemoration was easy to assess: whether or not it could claim real university-community interaction. Bazzell remarked that "public engagement as an outcome of the *Brown* celebrations . . . is a wonderful idea," but "having an impact on



everyday people's lives in your own backyard is an idea, not a plan." As she put it, "You can't take potential to the bank." Teresa noted that against the landscape of the many *Brown* Commemoration overtures to "interaction" and "dialogue" that "float across the *Brown* Commemoration, here is someone who nails it down." As we show later in this chapter, much of the *Brown* Commemoration's evocation of "interaction" and "dialogue" did not reach out to the broader community, but instead focused on diverse constituencies within the university.

Also noticing the unrealized potential of university events in general was Cope Cumpston, art director of the University of Illinois Press and member of the Urbana District 116 School Board. A *Brown* Commemoration enthusiast who attended numerous events throughout the year, Cumpston saw the commemoration as decidedly exceptional. In her conversation with Teresa, she repeatedly described an "energy" that is usually "flattened by the bureaucracy and the tone of high level administrators." Cumpston insisted that one of the reasons for the success of the *Brown* Commemoration was the university's sizable financial commitment: "If people expect good things to happen without money," she observed, "they're wrong."

Bazzell's cautious involvement and Cumpston's enthusiastic attendance typify the two most common modes of non-student involvement in *Brown* Commemoration activities. In the voices of Banks, McKinn, and Bazzell, we hear divergent responses and critiques of the commemoration. At the beginning of the year, Banks found *Brown* a curious choice for commemoration, since its immediate effects were barely visible: from this perspective, a Supreme Court decision that failed to go far enough or do enough was unlikely to spark social change in the present. Bazzell's response, which spotlighted the lack of community-university interaction fostered by the commemoration, suggests that the outcome, like the event commemorated, was not enough. McKinn's remarks, interestingly, seem to voice both sets of concerns. His first response to the commemoration, characterizing the *Brown* decision as "assimilationist," seems to echo Banks' initial response. His subsequent message to our group, which sets out to clarify many Indian communities' stance of "separate but equal (or sovereign)," emphasizes differences between the experience and politics of African Americans and Native Americans. It thus implies a critique of the commemoration resembling Bazzell's: again, the commemoration's focus was too narrow, too tightly tied to the experience of African Americans. And yet, when McKinn suggests that the commemoration may have exceeded the legacy of *Brown*, he names the largest obstacle to producing a more broadly focused series of events over the year. At what point does such a commemoration lose its intellectual coherence? How does a planning committee determine the point at which too much has been put on the table, and too many issues have been introduced? How does it negotiate the competing claims of various campus minority groups, especially when each of these groups can rightly claim that its own experiences, perspectives, and needs have been ignored for far too long already?

#### **4.3.2 "Maybe I Have to Write the Book Myself"**

While the great majority of *Brown* events were held on campus, the commemoration led many of our interlocutors to reflect on the ideals and realities of the relationship between university and community. As many of the observers below note, the *Brown* Commemoration did not entirely succeed in its efforts to extend a hand to the community. At the very outset of the commemoration year, the *Brown* committee held an

open meeting to alert the community to upcoming events and gather ideas for further outreach. This important effort notwithstanding, the committee then entitled its public call for project applications “Through Multiple Lenses: Faculty, Students, and Staff,” excluding mention of community members. A member of the *Brown* organizing committee later acknowledged this “oversight,” recalling that the entire group looked through the brochure before it went to press. In Spring 2004, the organizing committee attempted to redress the exclusion by producing a new flyer directed more overtly to the community, and distributing it widely off campus. Teresa remarked in her notes that the earlier oversight nonetheless reflects tensions in the commemoration that run throughout the responses provided below. In these responses from community members, we note two visions of the university: as a resource to serve the local Champaign-Urbana community—to “spread the wealth,” as one event organizer said; and as a critical training ground for the next generation of professionals who will enter and transform the community.

In February, Nicole and Teresa heard from Robert Smith, an African American employed by the U of I as an academic professional and a long-time community activist. (We use a pseudonym here at his request.) Smith shared remarks similar to Bazzell’s critique of the commemoration’s unrealized potential. As he talked with them about the status of education in the surrounding communities of Champaign and Urbana, Smith observed that a productive relationship among the university, the local school districts, and the African American community remains “just an idea.” While he believed that the U of I could help to improve the troubled relationship between the Champaign Unit 4 School District and the African American community, he also believed that the university has failed, despite many opportunities, to make a positive impact on the community. He recognized the presence of “so many people at the university with educational training and skills that they could apply to problems in the community,” but he noted that the university, like the local school districts, is bogged down by competition for resources. He had no doubt about who gets short shrift, citing one consequence of status quo attitudes on race: “The University’s record for hiring and retaining African-American faculty and staff is dismal.”

Similarly, Professor Cynthia Oliver, who organized the commemoration’s dance events with Dianne McIntyre and Amaniyea Payne, called for aggressive outreach on the part of the university, “specifically to the black Champaign-Urbana community,” noting particularly the “lack of connection.” Charging the university with responsibility for interacting with the community, Oliver asked, “How do we interact with people? How do people imagine us (the university) as a resource?” Teresa noted that Oliver’s approach to *Brown* spoke to her larger sense of the university’s responsibility to the community: “Cynthia wants to ‘spread the wealth,’ so she is having the dancers perform at community centers.” Oliver also invited children from the local Boys’ and Girls’ Club to the dress rehearsal so they could see the show without buying tickets. Oliver saw the university as a potential community resource that can make a difference only if it cultivates relationships across the university-community boundary.

Oliver’s views accord with those of Bazzell, who was emphatic that the university has a role to play. Teresa found that Bazzell’s ideal university is open and interactive: it reaches out and invites in. Bazzell charged the library, in particular, with the task of “helping.” Tired of being told that “the information is out there,” she wanted the library

to “Help me!” In her view, the university understands public service as an attempt to indoctrinate the public in the ways of the university: “They try to make you them. . . . They are always trying to help you by trying to teach you to help yourself.” Comically reversing a clichéd parable, she remarked, “If everyone’s approach at the university is to teach me to fish, that’s a problem because I can’t spend my whole day fishing.” This reversal counters assumptions often made by libraries—and universities—about how to help people empower themselves. Seizing these assumptions by the horns, Bazzell protested that there are times when the university needs to “serve” rather than teach. Frustrated by an experience when she asked for resources from the university, she wryly remarked, “Maybe I have to write the book myself”; all the same, she wished someone would just forward the information: “Call me, send me a package in the mail, or send me an e-mail saying, ‘Imani, I got it!’” “To be sure, Bazzell’s comic darts express a common, and very human, frustration experienced by many—faculty as well as students—within the university: sometimes, one wants just to lay hands on a particular resource as quickly as possible, instead of receiving a tutorial on how to find it. But her remarks also dramatize the fact that community members facing work, family, and social obligations have limited time for “fishing”: their needs often differ radically from the needs of university members, and require a different response.

Bazzell saw the necessity for engagement at other levels, in other registers, than those typically found at the university. When asked by Teresa, “How does the university relate to people every day?” Bazzell answered, “Not very well, if at all.” She added a remark we included in the previous chapter: “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.” She recognized the potential for such contact, but suggested that ideologies separating the work of community members from the work of university members prevent its realization. As remedy for a “certain mindset that keeps things closed off to the community,” she suggested: “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.” Bazzell acknowledged that such relationships are difficult to forge, partly because faculty “claim that they cannot penetrate the community networks; some say, ‘I can’t get in, I’ve tried.’” Teresa wrote, “Imani wants to know what this response means. . . . 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.” In her conversation with Teresa, Bazzell imagined and described a mutually beneficial relationship between the university and the community; in equally precise terms, she explained how and why this relationship did not exist. She believed a relationship to the university entails access to more resources related to community concerns, and she was determined to find places to cultivate that relationship despite the difficulties.

While our interlocutors believed the university must be an immediate and ready resource for the community, they also recognized the important role the university could play in educating future service professionals, especially teachers, who have the potential to transform the community. Robert Smith promoted a model of university-community relations in which the university functions as an enlightened training ground for new generations of envoys to the community. From this perspective, university-community relations extend into the future. In her interview notes, Teresa described Smith’s

continued optimism, despite his observations about the realities of race relations and the university-community relationship. Teresa wrote, “Smith is optimistic that the university has the ability to train, not indoctrinate, the next group of thinkers, and more specifically the next group of teachers. The university sets a stage for students to learn about themselves and others so they can go out and address the necessary issues. This is what excites Smith about the university and it is in that way that the university is extremely important to the community.” Smith’s model recalls moments at *Brown* events characterizing students as envoys to the community. As one example, we remember a rare off-campus event, “Dee Brown and Media Depictions of Native Americans,” which met in the Champaign City Council chambers. John Sanchez, a professor at Penn State University and a member of the Yaqui and Chirahua Apache Nations, discussed stereotypes of Native Americans and the damage they do to self-esteem and education. Paul reported that during the question and answer session, “One audience member (a white woman) said that she was a public school teacher for many years and wondered what Professor Sanchez would suggest for teachers ensuring they address the concerns of Native children. Sanchez responded that he feels that diversity training should be a college requirement for all teachers.” By representing the university as the site for “diversity training” for teachers or other community workers, Sanchez showed one way in which the university can meet its responsibility to consider how the next generation can transform the community.

The university might well provide “diversity training” by setting “a stage for students to learn about themselves and others so they can go out and address the necessary issues,” as Teresa put it in her paraphrase of Smith’s remarks. Such a vision reflects the vision of Dean Susan Fowler, a co-chair of the planning committee. In an interview with Nicole and Rene, she asserted that the College of Education could make a great impact in the community because it sends teachers to schools around the state, which in turn helps future students come to the University of Illinois. She said, “We want more engagement with Chicago Public Schools. We want more minorities to send a message to younger students that they can come to the U of I to learn, grow, and be comfortable.” Like Smith and Sanchez, Fowler believed that teachers who are trained at the U of I could then enact what they have learned in local settings across the state.

Throughout the year, we heard people argue that the university should be both a resource that serves its local community, and a critical training ground on diversity for the next generation of community members. To this end, *Brown* served as a catalyst for our interlocutors to reflect on the relationship between the university and community. Almost by necessity, such reflections named broader assumptions about what a university should be. We provide a sampling of these assumptions in the next section.

#### **4.3.3 “And Hell, This Is a Public Institution”**

A university’s inhabitants draw conclusions not only about what universities are, but what they are for. They may reflect on universities in general, but they also often make determinations about the nature and purpose of their own particular university. Thus, when we spoke with people about the *Brown* Commemoration, it came as little surprise when they couched their replies within stories about what, by their lights, the university is—and what it should be. What captured our attention, though, was how intense criticism of the university could grow whenever *Brown* events illuminated a gap between the real university and the ideal university they imagined.

Imani Bazzell's imagined university stood at a great distance from the one that so often disappointed her in reality. But like most imagined universities, hers was not a uniform image. She described a "busy" university, but wondered if "they are really busy or just busy being busy." Such busyness makes faculty "wet rags by the time they get home" because "all day long everyday there is something to do." To at least one faculty member of the EBC team, this comment mirrored daily experience. As we noted earlier, institutional commitment to excellence demands that faculty devote constant attention to the myriad of barely-visible tasks associated with teaching and administration in order to fuel the ponderous engine of the university. Further, Bazzell tackled the very notion of the "expert" at the heart of the research institution: "The academy tends to believe that people are not experts unless they travel and do work over 50 miles away from home." She opposed this assumption to her own values: "Are people making a difference in everyday people's lives?" Because "people get caught up in the academy," which she glossed as a "campus mindset" that "serves itself," Bazzell was certain that it failed to make this difference. Bazzell then offered a pithy definition: "And hell, this is a public institution. And last time I checked, it is supported with my tax dollars!" For Bazzell, the fact that the university is public, and publicly supported, says it all: it should serve the public and it should be locally grounded and responsive. When the university does nothing but talk to itself and insure its own comfortable reproduction, she argued, it has strayed far from its appointed mission.

Bazzell extended her diagnosis of a university allergic to the daily lives of local people with a fascinating discussion of university practices. Teresa had learned what a "meaningful exchange" meant to Bazzell as she took the podium at a *Brown* event, but Bazzell also had more general comments to make about the normal register of the university. Challenging the prevailing mode of presentation at universities, she asked boldly, "What is the point of reading from a book or a paper at a conference?" Here Teresa signaled her agreement in her notes, "I think this is a problem for many people who are looking for a dialogue. . . . There should be discussion, engagement; anything else is 'boring.'" "While some members of our team have attended fascinating and utterly democratic lectures read from a text, as well as seminars that, despite their protestations of being audience-centered, enacted dull and irritating displays of tyranny, all of us agree that presentations should aim to evoke dialogue and engagement. As Bazzell argued, the presentation that fails to observe or meet this goal "keeps the university closed." Her biting critiques of the university aside, Bazzell was quick to note that the "only reason why I, as a person of color, can live in rural middle America is precisely because of this university." Teresa and Bazzell had a good laugh when she said this. Several times chuckling "you know" under her breath, she continued: "In a small Midwestern town how else could, you know, a conscious person of color live unless it was in a university town. Because the university is a gateway to the rest of the nation and the rest of the world . . . other small towns would just be, of course, very parochial." Bazzell's ambivalence, involving simultaneous criticism and appreciation of the university, captures the sentiments of many of our interlocutors.

As we mentioned above, Cynthia Oliver spoke of the "university as resource" and similarly of "spreading the wealth," recalling the service university that Bazzell sketched so vividly. Echoing those comments on the university and the community, Oliver also described a university in which it is by no means clear how information "travels." When

Teresa informed her about the designated summer orientations for incoming minority students, a matter dear to Teresa's heart, Oliver told her that since there was no such orientation for faculty, she "had to ask about 'where people were.'" Teresa noted that they both laughed, and then added parenthetically, "She is referring to where the minority faculty were." It seemed that Oliver imagined a university that is connected to the community in more transparent ways, revealing its skeins of exchange and information to all. Importantly, though, Oliver also imagined a university that works in a different register: in the realm of the emotions. In this vein she described the particular sort of communication that happens through the arts and performance, and she took a moment to note to Teresa that she had self-consciously named her *Brown* event, "Conversations on Black and *Brown*." She was most explicit when she remarked, "The most important thing is for people to be moved." Oliver described a university that, if still very much a work in progress, has nonetheless been radically transformed by the *Brown* decision. In her telling, the fact that she, an African American woman, could "stand up in front of a racially diverse class as their teacher," speaks volumes. When she asked her students in the beginning of the fall 2003 semester how much they knew about the *Brown* decision and its impact, Oliver noted that many of them were embarrassed about their ignorance on the topic. She told them not to be, but drove home the importance of knowing about *Brown* this way: "Had it not been for this decision we would not be in the same room together. And on top of that, I would not be teaching you, plain and simple."

Robert Smith, whom we met above, described the university as "just like the school district," with competing interests and fierce competition for scarce resources, but nevertheless capable of training its students, especially new teachers, to meet the needs of a diverse population. With this belief, Smith pointed to a new generation that will truly open the university to its broader constituencies, the local community and a diverse America. He was so convinced that the U of I stood at a crucial crossroads that he could imagine its future only in terms of a binary question: "Do they want to continue on the path that Nancy Cantor has taken the university, or do they want to revert back to the fifties mentality which reinforces the belief system that this society only belongs to the privileged few?" He described a university where for the first time he had not come to work every day "knowing that people don't even want you here." While Cantor had removed that "unique challenge" of working at the university as an African American, Smith feared that after Cantor's departure the university could very well "revert back" to elitism, classism, and racism he had experienced before her arrival. Teresa wrote in her fieldnotes, "I thought this interview was amazing. . . . Even as I was typing it up, I was awed and inspired by some of the things he said."

The *Brown* year was a touchstone for many people. Because it offered a reflection of the university itself, and provoked sustained questioning of its identity, *raison d'être*, commitments, and values, the *Brown* Commemoration amounted to much more than a routine of thematically coordinated university programming. When *Brown* excited it did so enormously, speaking to an optimistic horizon of university potential. Conversely, when *Brown* disappointed, it hurt—revealing yet again the unmet promise of the ideal university.

#### 4.4 Concluding Reflections

Of all of the feedback from Advisory Committee members, none has provoked more thought than the charge that our report both reflects and reproduces business as usual in at least two ways: our choice to feature the institutional leaders of the *Brown* year, and the scope of our coverage of the commemoration year. We wrestled with this charge in many hours of discussion.

Several comments by advisory committee members prompted us to revisit our choice to feature Nancy Cantor, Susan Fowler, and Thomas Ulen as “producers” of the *Brown* Commemoration. In May 2002, the Diversity Initiatives Planning Committee (DIPC) made a list of recommendations, including a call for the campus to invest in programming that would mark the *Brown* decision’s fiftieth anniversary. Arguably, it was DIPC that seeded the *Brown* year. Yet the lack of overlap between DIPC and the *Brown* Organizing Committee is striking: only one person was a member of both. As we thought about how we had privileged the commemoration’s campus and committee leadership, we grappled with the extent to which the *Brown* year did not include many campus diversity stakeholders—or, perhaps, the extent to which these stakeholders systematically distanced themselves from the *Brown* effort. What, then, can we make of our research team’s role in the replication of business as usual? Unquestionable is our prominent featuring of Cantor, Fowler, and Ulen as those in official leadership positions associated with the *Brown* year. Our decision to do so is consistent with the nature of the commemoration: it was, after all, a conventional program in which campus-level administrators allocated funding to college-level administrators and faculty members. Does reinforcing this order of things in our report necessarily reinforce business as usual? The question is ultimately for readers to decide, but we would suggest that it would be difficult to discern the flows of resources that enabled events—and the intelligence motivating those flows—without characterizing the hopes and responses of those who were charged with making the *Brown* Commemoration happen.

Some advisory committee members also called the scope of event coverage into question. The Housing Division of Student Affairs sponsored many of the events featured in this report, which left some of our readers to question—rightly—how and why we seemed to focus on events that were developed out of that quarter of the university. In hindsight, the events covered by the student ethnographers did fall heavily under those from Student Affairs, but it is essential to understand that from week to week, the students decided which events to cover. As explained in the “ABCs of EBC,” our next chapter, the undergraduate student ethnographers chose to attend events that seemed most interesting and most relevant to them and to the issue of diversity on campus.