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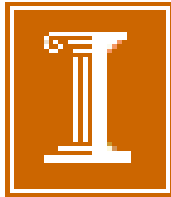 ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT ON THE JUBILEE COMMEMORATION OF THE *BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION* SUPREME COURT DECISION, University of Illinois

Prepared for the
Jubilee Commemoration Organizing Committee

Ethnography of the *Brown* Commemoration Team
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5.0 The ABCs of EBC

We turn the ethnographic eye on ourselves in this chapter for several reasons. We hope that as we show the processes behind this report, readers will be able to better evaluate and situate our findings. As we disclose our own processes, we also hope to display, if only in miniature, an example of the sustained self-evaluation that we believe universities must entertain. Further, as we describe and discuss EBC, a project initiated by the U of I that nevertheless broke with some conventional university practices, we hope to offer a guide—and warning—for those readers interested in starting similar projects. We have suggested in the first two chapters that doing "business as usual" at the university exacts a cost that can diminish undergraduate education and the university's involvement with the surrounding community. In this chapter, we reveal some of the costs of time and energy exacted by our attempt to break with some conventional university practices. As we discuss both costs and rewards, we anticipate that some readers will be interested in the logistics of a qualitative study that partnered faculty and students in examination of the university, a method that can be extended to the study of other institutions as well. In the same way, we believe that discussion of how we used conferencing and writing technologies—with varying degrees of efficiency, expertise, and trust—will help others conduct collaborative projects. Finally, we wish to report a central lesson learned by all involved in EBC: such a project necessarily muddies distinctions between the subject and object of research, between the participant and observer, and between the expert and novice.

We could learn this lesson in part because of the unusual configuration of our research team, which found its origins, as we reported in the introduction, in the Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI). The team's ten members included the four undergraduates whom readers have met and heard from throughout this report— Rene Bangert, Paul Davis, Nicole Ortegón, and Teresa Ramos, and two graduate students—Amy Wan and her colleague. Its four faculty members—Nancy Abelmann, Mark Aber, Bill Kelleher, and Peter Mortensen—had all been members of the working group that led to the formation of the Ethnography of the University (EUI) initiative; Nancy and Bill had initiated EUI, and Peter had early on joined them as a co-coordinator. The team's fields of expertise and training included anthropology, ethnic studies, international studies, psychology, and writing studies.

Collaborative ethnographic work is rare and rarer still when it combines undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. As the 1998 Boyer Commission Report on undergraduate education at research universities attested, few undergraduates in the social sciences and humanities have the opportunity to participate in sustained research. That report argued that if the research university is to fulfill its potential, undergraduates across the disciplines must be given these opportunities. The commission's follow-up study again documented that the social sciences and humanities lagged far behind natural and applied sciences in providing undergraduates with research experience. Both EBC and EUI were conceived as responses to this problem, and because we hope similar projects will take root on other campuses, we disclose our errors and missteps with all the candor we can muster. But as we reveal our mistakes, we also point to research and writing conventions, to the practices of university committees, and to other examples of "business as usual" in universities that make projects like this one difficult to execute.

We tell our story chronologically. After explaining how EUI came into being, and then how EBC evolved as an EUI project, we describe how members of the team were recruited. We then describe our ethnographic and research processes in detail, paying close attention to the ways in which conferencing technology shaped these processes. We then turn to writing software as we close with a discussion of how fieldnotes, analyses, and discussions were distilled and arranged to become this report.

5.1 The Ethnography of the University

EUI then EOTU, a campus-wide initiative that sponsors undergraduate research on the university and archives it in web-accessible format, began as a group of about twenty students, staff, and faculty who met eighteen times during the 2002-03 academic year under the auspices of the Center for Advanced Studies. This working group's goal was to think about how to conduct ethnographic research on universities and how, in turn, to create a lasting web-based repository for those research findings. As it asked how to conduct qualitative research on a university, the group immediately confronted a simple, but vexing, question: What is a university, anyway? People wondered, for example, whether to define a university as the sum of all of its administrative units, departments, offices, and so on. They also asked whether it makes sense instead to think about a university as the composite of all of its constituencies—students, parents, staff, maintenance and other workers, faculty, administrators, and others. They considered spatial definitions, and discussed the constellation of classrooms, buildings, dorms, fraternities, sororities, quads, yards, greens, and streets that make up a university. Over the course of these conversations, the group turned again and again to the meanings and values people assign to university units, people, or spaces. After much talk, many readings, and the invaluable help of visitors from on and off campus, the group began to define "the university" as a composite of narratives that communicate diverse, and even radically disparate, meanings and values. From this perspective, EUI appreciates that universities and colleges—as institutions represented by organizations and organizational charts, by numbers and maps and brochures, and by many partial histories—are composites of diverse prose, statistical, and visual narratives that communicate complex and often conflicting institutional values, commitments, and identities. EUI relies on this understanding of the university not as an exclusive or final definition, but rather as a working construct well suited to its research mode and methods.

The working group developed this narrative-centered approach throughout the year. In this report, we highlight only those sessions and insights that led most directly to EUI's current shape. As an example, Peter Ewell, Senior Associate, National Center for Higher Education Management System (NCHEMS), introduced the idea of an "institutional reality check," challenging members to think about "who we think we are" in relation to our "reality." When Ewell asked the group to consider its "peer group," members quibbled over criteria: must peers be public institutions? Land grant universities? Doctoral/Extensive universities (a Carnegie Foundation classification)? Large? Rurally situated? Ewell also warned that the instruments of educational assessment already developed for the P-12 sector are now ready for higher education, and suggested that EUI, as a repository of student work, could serve university assessment needs better than those devised by outsiders. When Carol Livingstone (Associate Provost

and Director, Division of Management Information, U of I) and Marilyn Murphy Marshall (Associate Director, University Office for Academic Policy Analysis, University of Illinois) sent group members to the University of Illinois online databases to investigate the numerical narratives through which the university presents itself, the group learned that no single statistical narrative is sufficiently representative. Finally, we mention a session on university-community relations with Mark Aber and Julian Rappaport of the Department of Psychology's Clinical/Community Division, Thom Moore, then-director of the university's Psychological Services Center, and Aaron Ebata from the Department of Human and Community Development and the University Extension Services. Each presenter spoke on the university from the perspective of the work he performed along the boundaries of the university and community. Their approach to the university, relying on narratives and networks, emphasized the fact that there is no easy way to fix the university's perimeter.

These and other sessions helped members of the working group determine how they would present the university as an object of inquiry to students and other campus members. A session led by one of its own members, meanwhile, shaped the pedagogical and technological platform upon which EUI would initially stand. Professor Chip Bruce introduced the group to the Inquiry Page, web-based software developed in the U of I Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences. Describing itself as "a dynamic virtual community where inquiry-based education can be discussed, resources and experiences shared, and innovative approaches explored in a collaborative environment," the Inquiry Page (IP, later iLabs) offered a template and a virtual working space that could house student projects.

Two sessions with university librarians, Ellen Swain of the Student Life and Culture Archives (http://www.library.U of I.edu/ahx/slc) and Beth Sandore, Associate University Librarian for Information Technology, challenged the group to consider how university materials are and should be archived. The Student Life and Culture Archives, unique among university libraries nationwide, holds a wealth of materials documenting student experience outside the classroom: these materials, clearly, would be of immense value to students seeking historical grounding for their ethnographic explorations of the university's present shape. Sandore, meanwhile, introduced the group to the idea of "institutional repositories" aiming to archive universities' digital output. The group learned to think of university archives as an institution's footprints, traces that reveal a university's values, commitments, and priorities. It also began to imagine how EUI might preserve student work in digital form for the foreseeable future, and to understand why that preservation would be valuable.

This conceptual work completed, EUI launched its public life in Fall 2003, when it was piloted in one anthropology course and four sections of first-year rhetoric courses. From the first, courses emphasized research on the university, rather than in or at the university, in order to help students understand the university as a specific institution possessing a specific history and a specific set of relationships with the surrounding community. By positioning the university in this fashion, and then asking students to recognize that its competing narratives reflected its many historical contingencies, EUI hoped to enable students to connect the university to a broad array of social and political institutions, as well as to local, regional, national, and global forces. As the pilot courses

unfolded, their instructors, along with the coordinators of EUI, recognized further implications of the initiative.

It became apparent that as student inquiry engaged conflicting university narratives, it would critique them or perhaps intervene. EUI's members learned to think of students as members of a large research venture who both use and produce knowledge. Specifically, a web archive of student research implied that students would both draw from that archive (as users) and contribute to it (as producers). No students, then, would ever start from scratch. Rather, they would begin in the middle: taking off from where others had left off, piggy-backing on classmates' research, or even carrying their own research from course to course. As a consequence, they could create documents with lasting value that retained meaning beyond the end of a semester or the false closure of a final grade.

While the paragraphs above provide an overview of EUI's intellectual and pedagogical inception, we recognize that this initiative, like any other university endeavor, has more than one history. The funding history of this project, for example, may be of great interest to some readers, and this story can be told quickly. In the fall of 2003, as the first EUI pilot courses were drawing to a close, the Office of the Chancellor named EUI a Cross-Campus Initiative (CCI; see http://www.admin.U of I.edu/initiatives/ for details). The CCI program, which aimed to foster creative and collaborative projects that exceed existing university units, represents a way of moving money out of traditional units and into new constellations of interdisciplinary interest. As a CCI recipient, EUI received a lump sum of $200,000 in non-continuing support.

While the aim of the CCI program was admirable, and the funding was generous, the faculty members coordinating EUI soon discovered that they had received a mixed blessing. Precisely because CCIs are not housed in traditional units, for example, they do not enjoy the kinds of institutional support (clerical staff, computers, phone lines, and so on) that departments and colleges take for granted. More crucially, EUI, like most CCIs, was the dream-child of faculty members. None of these faculty members, however, was relieved of other official university duties, even though all had substantial service and administrative obligations as well as the usual teaching and research responsibilities. Like other CCIs, then, EUI could be sustained only by extraordinary effort, and there have been moments when it has seemed that EUI and EBC have been running on empty. We name this problem not to make excuses, but to support this chapter's interrogation of the processes of research, writing, and reward. Because we are interested in that gray line between new and creative work at universities and the activities that appear to be business as usual, we also ask how new work can draw institutional support without becoming ossified, at one extreme, or exhausting its producers, at the other. Put another way, we wonder how faculty can take up the charge to involve students in research, and why they should do it, if their efforts fall outside conventional structures of evaluation and compensation.

5.2 From EUI to EBC

In the midst of the EUI pilot phase, as EUI's coordinators were still learning how to guide student research and manage the technical details of the Inquiry Page, Judith Ramaley, Assistant Director of the National Science Foundation (Education and Human

Resources Directorate), visited The U of I. Dr. Ramaley helped the coordinators realize that EUI was well-suited to the task of documenting innovative programs on campus, and the innovative program that had most intrigued her during her campus visit was none other than the *Brown v. Board of Education* Jubilee Commemoration. Her insight seeded EBC: soon after, EUI was contracted to document the *Brown* Commemoration.

When word of this possibility came their way, EUI's coordinators began to imagine what a collaboration of this sort would look like. Who would do the research? How would they do it? How much would it cost? After some early inquiries with Rose Ann Miron, then Special Projects Coordinator in the Office of the Chancellor and a central member of the *Brown* Commemoration Organizing Committee, and after considerable deliberation and conversation among its coordinators, EUI hammered out a brief proposal that held fast to its larger commitments as it named the resources that would be necessary. Nancy, Bill, and Peter quickly determined that EBC would need to be driven by paid undergraduate student research, and that they would need a team of committed faculty and the help of graduate students to facilitate the student research process. As they began to envision the process and results of an ethnography of the *Brown* Commemoration, they realized the need for caution and the value of adopting a contractual approach: they did not want to make promises that they could not fulfill, and they wanted to communicate the product they envisioned with precision so as to avoid misunderstandings. Even at this early stage of EUI's development, they had learned that not all university people appreciated EUI's approach to the university, including its commitment to undergraduate researchers. Below, we reproduce the early notes, with their caveats and nervous promises, that EUI sent to the Organizing Committee. These notes stressed that because the *Brown* Commemoration was a dispersed and heterogeneous effort, there would be no way to "cover" or fully document the commemoration, and that, as this report attests, a look at *Brown* would necessarily mean a look at the wider university and at matters of race and equity in particular.

> In our short encounter with the BC (*Brown* Jubilee Commemoration), it has become very clear that this is a huge venture. While the BC has a distinct history—namely a diversity committee that made a recommendation, and in turn a chancellor-appointed committee that worked hard to disburse funds so as to make for a very large campus effort—by today the BC is really a very dispersed effort that has been realized by many units, constituencies, and individuals. For example, when the Housing Division engaged the BC, they naturally worked through their own chain of command, down to the resident directors, and from them to the resident assistants and so on. There is, then, neither a single BC, nor a single vision enlivening BC (although the promotion material for events attempts to convey a singular vision). While, of course, there have been visions that have been communicated from on-high (e.g., funds were awarded on a competitive basis and of course certain values and commitments informed those decisions), on the ground (i.e., in the day-to-day events and activities) the BC has been touched by many and diverse ideas about what it means to commemorate *Brown*, what it means to commemorate it here and now, what people hope to achieve/make with this commemoration, etc. In a broad sense BC is a vision of a campus

dialogue and each BC agent (i.e., those units/persons involved in the planning and executing of BC activities) imagines that dialogue in a particular way. Another way of saying this is that each BC agent has some idea of what the *Brown* legacy can/should/might mean today locally (and beyond). (All this is happening within a campus context that often lacks cross-cutting discussions of complex issues like *Brown*, which means that BC activities are being staged, attended, and interpreted without easy reference to other, similar enterprises.)

Now, as if this isn't complicated enough, there are in turn the many and diverse consumers of the BC—these can range from people who attend *Brown* events, to people in classes affected in some way by the BC, etc. Like the BC producers, these consumers will bring a broad range of meanings and understandings to BC, and will in turn understand and partake in the BC dialogue in particular ways. Furthermore, to make it all even more complex, the BC will take on lives beyond BC events (in off-stage conversations, in passions ignited by the events, and in who knows what)—or at least that is the intention of some BC organizers.

Needless to say, the EBC is faced with something very large: many and diverse visions, many and diverse consumers, and many and diverse after-lives. In a broad sense, EBC will try to get a feeling for some of this. There is NO WAY to do a comprehensive ethnography of the BC: it would be impossible to cover BC. Rather, we can collectively become familiar enough with the life of the BC on our campus that we can eventually feature the web of meanings, conversations, and effects that make up the BC.

And to make the project even more daunting, we also appreciate that the BC—its particular shape and life on our campus—offers a window on U OF I itself: on the university's sense of what it is, on matters of race and equity on our campus, etc. It is in this sense that it is so fitting that EUI take on the BC because it indeed offers an opportunity to examine the university broadly.

The report that we have been charged to write will not be a tome; rather it will be a parsimonious document (under 150 [double-spaced] pages) that will tell selective stories, share revealing anecdotes, trace meaningful *Brown* trails, etc. Depth will be more important than breadth. We will not, for example, list every single thing that happened under the name of the BC, but we will go into detail about a little corner of activity here or there that seems to tell a BC story that one couldn't gather from simply a review of the program.

The vision and caveats of these paragraphs are, we think our readers will find, not so far off the mark of EBC as it unfolded. The tensions we identified—between the narrow contours of the *Brown* Commemoration and ethnography of the university at large, between breadth and depth, and between producers and consumers—persisted as research and writing challenges throughout the course of this project.

Before describing the constitution of the research team, we need to make two facts plain. First, it is important to note that we began our ethnography after the *Brown*

Commemoration was already underway. This late start, and the dizzying number of *Brown* events, gave our EBC year a breathless quality: there was, we would quickly learn, no way to keep up, let alone catch up. EBC did not benefit from prior planning; we made mistakes that we hope other projects could avoid with foresight, a luxury we did not enjoy. Second, we want to remind our readers the university offices and committee responsible for the commemoration itself effectively commissioned this ethnography. Indeed, we almost immediately met with the co-chairs of the organizing committee that began planning the commemoration in 2002, and several months later we were invited to join a meeting of the entire committee. We were quite surprised when the committee handed us—with seemingly no editing on their part—all of their relevant files. It is, of course, an ethnographer's dream to be given unlimited access to these sorts of materials, and this access speaks to the committee's willingness to submit the *Brown* Commemoration to the sort of inquiry that we had proposed.

Even more importantly, EBC was sponsored not as an external project to study *Brown*, but rather as a critical part of *Brown* helping to realize the vision of a vital and effective commemorative year. By submitting *Brown* to this sort of ethnographic scrutiny, the committee was making good on its commitment to consider how far "we" (the U of I, the American university, and the nation) have come on matters of race and social justice. It is now a commonplace of contemporary anthropology that ethnographers become part of the scenes they describe and analyze, but here we observe something even larger: we were commissioned to become a part of the commemoration, as well as to study it. Only the hubris of the social sciences, perhaps, could have kept us blind to this reality for much of the research period. In any case, it was only in the late spring, and most forcefully during our formal interview of Chancellor Cantor, that we realized that we too were *Brown*, and that, as is always the case in ethnography, subject and object were inextricably intertwined.

EBC co-organizers decided early on that the project would benefit from a steering committee. We sent invitations to several sorts of university people: first, to those EUI Working Group members who remained enthusiasts and who had interests in race and diversity; second, to the directors of the ethnic studies units on campus (African American Studies and Research Program, Asian American Studies, Latina/Latino Studies, and American Indian Studies); third, to the directors of the existing cultural houses on campus (La Casa Cultural Latina, African American Cultural Program, and Native American House); fourth, to several key people in residential life; and finally, to several other campus people whose research interests complemented this project.

The December 2003 meeting of the Steering Committee proved an eye-opener, since it led to heated conversation—not about EBC, but about the rationale, meaning, and success of the *Brown* year. Brief but intense exchanges over lunch revealed some deep-seated skepticism about the university's "real" commitment to race-related programming. Also at issue was the equal distribution of *Brown* money, since some believed that African American-related programming had received too much attention and money. Further, some argued that the campus was already saturated with programming, and wondered whether an audience for commemoration events existed. The gathering taught us that these individuals, although they shared interests in race and diversity, were hardly unified on the *Brown* year; for that matter, they disagreed about the legacy of the *Brown* decision itself, and whether it warranted a grand commemoration. As we had already

begun to suspect, the *Brown* year would not lack controversy: we recognized that the disagreements it engendered would constitute the fault lines at the heart of our study.

5.3 The Research Team

In this section we detail how each researcher was recruited to the project. We lay bare this process because of our shared commitment to bringing students to the research table, hoping that our readers might think about how to bring many more to similar projects.

In late October, when the EBC proposal was approved, the faculty budgeted for four undergraduate researchers to work about 10 hours each week, and for one or two graduate students to guide their activities. Nancy and Bill were then two months into their pilot anthropology course, which had enrolled a small and spirited group of undergraduates. Among these students were Teresa and Nicole, EUI enthusiasts par excellence, who had already "joined" EUI as undergraduate interns in Spring 2003 for the 2002-03 EUI Working Group. Faculty members are embarrassed to admit in print that the Fall 2002 Working Group, ostensibly committed to conceptualizing student-driven ethnography of the university, had failed to include a single undergraduate student. After many dead-end conversations about the "what and how" of hypothetical students, faculty finally realized that they might actually invite undergraduates into the group. Because this light dawned in the final days of the fall semester, they elected a top-down measure, one that again produces embarrassment as it is disclosed: they described the gist of EUI to colleagues in anthropology, and asked them to identify students who might be interested in and likely to contribute to the project. They then e-mailed the dozen or so students whose names came their way, and invited them to submit a short letter of interest. While this method brought Nicole to the project, Teresa found the project through her own desire to do research in cultural anthropology. As she cast about in the department for a faculty member willing to take on undergraduates in research, she came into contact with Bill Kelleher, who invited her to participate in EBC.

During the spring semester of EUI Working Group meetings, the four undergraduate interns stole the show as they led others in the task of imagining EUI. Of the four, only Teresa and Nicole remained on campus the next semester; both enthusiastically agreed to remain EUI interns and, to the delight of faculty, both elected to take the anthropology EUI offering. Their senior years became intimately intertwined with EUI, since both not only took this class, but also worked as EUI interns and EBC ethnographers. Over the course of their senior years, both of them also made countless EUI/EBC presentations to a wide variety of interested constituencies on campus. Further, Teresa wrote a senior thesis related to EBC and made the unanticipated decision to apply to anthropology graduate school, while Nicole made a similarly unexpected decision to apply to graduate programs in education and technology because of her EUI experience. As these details suggest, even though EBC began late in the game, Nicole and Teresa were poised to hit the ground running better than nearly anyone could have been. And so, one afternoon after class, while final approval of EBC was pending, Nancy, Bill, and Teresa walked across the quad to hear Joy Williamson discuss her recently published book on the U of I Project 500, a program we discussed in chapter 1. In the course of their conversation, Nancy suggested to Teresa that she might take notes at the event for future use in the

class and, maybe, the *Brown* research project. Those notes became the first official fieldnotes of the project.

Rene and Paul, meanwhile, were new to EUI, but they were hardly newcomers to the *Brown* Commemoration or to issues of race and diversity. Bill came to know both of them in his course, "Culture, Ethnicity and Conflict in a Globalizing World," and met and chatted with them at *Brown* events. While Rene was surprised by the invitation, wondering "how I stood out among the other 60 or so people in the class," conversations with both of them in office hours and after class revealed their keen interest in subject matter related to the *Brown* events. Further, since Bill had seen them attending early October events, he knew of their commitment to understanding and working on racial and ethnic issues.

As they discussed the composition of the research team, the faculty members agreed that it was important that the researchers themselves bring diverse racial identities and experiences to the project. These considerations aside, however, they needed to act quickly; further, they wanted to employ students whom they already knew as researchers and/or for having sustained interests in EBC themes. In the book project that follows on this report, a final substantive chapter, "The Paid Audience," will take up the student researchers' racial identifications in relation to EBC. There, Nicole's and Teresa's Latina and white heritage, as well as the fact that they both appear "white," will be addressed, as will Rene's whiteness and Paul's Native American and African American heritage. Meanwhile, we note with due irony that while all the faculty members are white, neither their whiteness, nor the fact that the project's graduate assistants are Asian American, was explicitly discussed over the course of EBC.

Like Nicole and Teresa, Amy and the graduate student with whom she had collaborated had become EUI insiders, primarily because they had volunteered to pilot EUI-affiliated rhetoric courses during the fall 2003 semester: it took no great deliberation to invite them to participate in EBC. And Bill, Nancy, and Peter had agreed, in their earliest conversations about EBC, that EUI Working Group member Mark Aber was a must-add to the EBC faculty coordinators. Mark's scholarly expertise on race and schooling, as well as his deep commitment to ethical and responsible university-community relations, suited him perfectly for this work.

Nicole, Paul, Rene, and Teresa committed to roughly 10 hours of weekly work for the remainder of the school year; Amy and her collaborator signed on as mentors to the undergraduates for 13 hours weekly for the spring semester; Nancy, Mark, Bill, and Peter assigned themselves the task of overseeing the project throughout the remainder of the school year and writing the project results over the summer months of 2004. As would be the case throughout the project's duration, they underestimated both the time and the number of people required to write the report now before readers. Even though Teresa and Amy contributed part-time writing assistance in the summer of 2004, while Rene and Nicole made long-distance comments on drafts, this version of the report has missed a series of deadlines, and now appears many years after the publication date its authors originally imagined. Ultimately, nine of the ten EBC members have collaborated to become coauthors of this report.

5.4 The Day to Day of Student Ethnography

While the research team agreed at the outset to meet each week, we began these meetings without a clear idea how they would proceed. As it turned out, our gatherings became the clearinghouse that determined almost every EBC activity, including how to keep track of *Brown* events, what events to attend, what additional fieldwork activities to include, how to write up fieldnotes, what materials to collect, how to begin to synthesize findings, and so on. In the five weeks of the fall semester remaining after formal constitution of the research team, the four faculty members met weekly with the four undergraduate students; towards the end of the semester, we were occasionally joined by graduate students Amy and her colleague who began to lead the meetings in the Spring 2004 semester. The faculty members decided that only two of their number would attend each spring meeting, partly in hopes of lightening the considerable burden of EUI, and partly in fear that if all four were present each time, they might overwhelm the students and their process. All the same, faculty members felt that they often talked too much and were too directive at the meetings.

5.5 Ironing out Technical Details

Our early meetings in November and December were devoted to answering three crucial questions: how to (1) coordinate and allocate work, (2) house the field notes and (3) envision the larger project. Right before Thanksgiving break, we were still working out how to organize the weekly meetings. Since the ethnographers had begun to generate some fieldnotes, we decided that meeting time could be well spent by responding to issues that stood out in the notes. Thus, we decided that everyone should review the week's fieldnotes before each weekly meeting. We also agreed on some uniformity for the notes, and stipulated, for example, that the ethnographer's name, event name, date of event, and date of write-up would appear at the top of every fieldnote.
Although fieldnotes were still sparse at this point, we wanted to establish systems and routines that would help us manage the enormous amount of data we anticipated (10 months later there were indeed 68 fieldwork entries and 84 files of commentary on those entries). Since we had neither the time nor the money to wait for others to build the software ideally suited to our needs, we instead identified the technologies we most needed—a web-based calendar and a conferencing and storage program—and chose them from the software available at no cost through the university. The software we chose allowed us to store and organize our work in a central location, an absolute necessity for this sort of large collaborative project. While the group's experience with digital technology ran the gamut of expertise, Peter took on the considerable task of managing the technology. EBC and this report seem nearly impossible to imagine without the technologies we discuss below.

5.6 From E-mail to WebBoard

In the early phase of the project, we relied on e-mail both to distribute information about *Brown* events and to post fieldnotes. It became readily apparent, however, that this e-mail deluge was difficult to manage and, worse, nearly impossible to archive. Most of

us had used WebBoard, an asynchronous course management system (facing retirement as of the time of this writing), in the classroom either as teachers or students. WebBoard offers an environment in which users can post messages to conferences, as well as attach documents. In addition to facilitating easy upload and download of documents, WebBoard provides uniquely titled conference spaces (presented as folder icons) so that users can easily locate and contribute to specific themes. Perhaps most usefully for our purposes, it also offers threaded communication, so that users can either post replies to an established topic within a thematic folder, or post a new topic. Threaded communication would become the heart of the EBC archive and the communication trail that led to this report. Importantly, because it requires a login and password for entry to a specific group, WebBoard offered us privacy; only the research group had access to the EBC WebBoard.

Beyond storing an archive of fieldnotes, group communication, and documents, we hoped that WebBoard would also function as an online space for group communication between meetings. Specifically, we hoped that online conversation would help us to extend and synthesize our initial thoughts, to reflect collectively on our findings, and even to begin sketching the themes of this report. These expectations echo the technology's classroom use, in which professors and instructors hope for online continuation of classroom learning and discussion. We established the following "conferences" to house our posts: Events and Interview Notes, *Brown* Jubilee Commemoration Event Announcements, Calendar, Planning/Logistics, Follow-up/To Do, Chat Transcripts, Contacts, Global Comments/Synthesis, Research/Sources and Misc. Document Center. This conference grid reveals our high expectations for this technology. Of course, in the real world of research, while some conferences, like "Event and Interview Notes" gathered many posts, others like "Follow-up/To Do" and "Planning and Logistics" remained nearly empty. Also, some conferences were used to ends very different from those their design dictated. "Global Comments/Synthesis," for example, came to house notes on the weekly meeting itself, instead of the between-meeting discussions imagined by faculty members. Later, this conference folder housed the preliminary ideas for this report. Late additions like "Book" and "Recommendations for Final Report" indicate how we took advantage of the technology's ability to add new conferences as the project developed.

Full-fledged adoption of WebBoard capabilities corresponding to our ideal vision took several months. Ironically, by deploying one of its technical capabilities, we inadvertently discouraged WebBoard's use in the first weeks. We enabled its e-mail notification system, which alerted the research team to posts made to the "Events and Interview Notes" conference: these e-mail notifications contained hyperlinks to the WebBoard post. Meanwhile, a number of us also chose to send separate e-mail notes along with our conference postings. As a result, it became possible to tune into at least part of the goings-on without ever directly logging into WebBoard. Beyond this basic question of use lay the larger question of whether WebBoard was being used for anything more than a space to which individuals posted notes or other information; at issue was the extent to which team members were communicating with one another in meaningful ways about either research logistics or more substantive research questions. To be frank, in the early months, WebBoard failed us (or we failed each other) on both counts. We were unable to iron out logistical matters online (e.g., who would attend what).

Additionally, we were not responding to the fieldnotes themselves. WebBoard became a bank for the deposit of fieldnotes, rather than a dynamic site for planning or discussion.

We are inclined to think about these early failings in several ways. First, given the velocity and volume of *Brown* events, in conjunction with our early unwillingness or perhaps inability to pare down our participation, we had little time for thorough response to others, for synthesis, or for long-range planning. Second, some members were reluctant to move from comfortable e-mail (an environment in which all of us routinely operated on a day-to-day, or even minute-to-minute basis) to WebBoard, which requires logging in and entering a password, activation barriers that seem to matter in busy lives already overtaxed before EBC. Third, we had not fully imagined what a dialogue about the fieldnotes might actually look like. It took considerable effort and detailed instructions, as well as homework-like assignments, to make WebBoard more dynamic and valuable.

It might also be the case that we simply were not ready, in the first weeks, to begin the work of commentary and meaningful synthesis. Teresa wrote, for example, "[i]n the beginning I found it very tedious in the midst of typing up fieldnotes, to type up commentary about those notes." Mark observed, "Early on it wasn't apparent to me that our reactions would become data." Nicole, on the other hand, discovered something of value in the attempt to "link my thoughts from previous notes to the notes I was currently working on, identifying common and/or strikingly opposing elements between various events I attended, interviews I conducted and/or conversations I otherwise participated in. . . . I found this process of 'building,' connecting one note to another and so on, to be a successful means of 'meta-reflection' for myself." But while she learned from synthesizing her own notes, she also felt a bit nervous about responding to another's work, and "worried about being tactful about the comments I was giving to my co-workers because it was a different role. I didn't want to have that sense of hierarchy because I wanted to be sure to provide constructive criticism and praise." In the same way, Nancy "was worried about not being too professorial in her interaction with the undergraduate researchers."

5.7 Managing *Brown* Events

Managing *Brown* events was a constant challenge, not least because it was not always clear what counted as a *Brown* event. To help sort out *Brown* programming, we configured an online "calendar" with a link through one of our WebBoard conferences. In our ambitious beginnings, we had hoped to schedule event attendance online, with everyone signing up for events throughout the week. This never happened; instead, in the early months of EBC, we devoted much of our weekly meetings to determining who would attend what. That this scheduling did not happen online reflects more than technical glitches. First, there was no single, up-to-date comprehensive clearinghouse of *Brown* events we could consult. More importantly, we had agreed that we would not limit our research to only those events that were officially sponsored by the *Brown* Commemoration, and therefore searched for additional race and diversity-related events. As it turned out, however, most negotiation as to who would cover what happened quite easily among the ethnographers through e-mail, and often in a flurry of messages exchanged just before an event. As Nicole recalled, "No matter the amount of meeting

time devoted to event coverage, the student ethnographers would have to e-mail one another rather frequently to confirm plans and/or alter meeting times and/or locations (i.e., in the case of interviews)."

In the early months, then, before we had collectively articulated the guiding themes of this project, personal interest, the contingencies of the researchers' schedules, and the seeming importance of an event itself determined what we "covered." Even though it had dismissed any ambition to survey the events comprehensively, the team nonetheless regretted its inability to attend and document many events that seemed likely to be compelling. Nor could we predict which events might spur subsequent informal meetings, events, or discussions—potential developments in which we were keenly interested. Only in the late spring did we become more aggressive about leaving events untouched by the members of our team, so as to instead develop our research themes, and focus on fieldnotes, synthesis, and interviews.

Our attention to the calendar did, however, leave its own mark on this project, insofar as we became more and more interested in *Brown* publicity in and of itself as a window on the nature of university communication networks. In fact, for Teresa, the question of access to these networks (and the events they communicated) became an abiding interest, as well as the topic of her senior honors thesis. As an example of the difficulty in obtaining information, our group did not know about the College of Education Achievement Gap Symposium until the day before it started, and then only because of one team member's personal connection to the College of Education. As a consequence, we began to ask how audiences were imagined, hailed, and invited. In the case of the College of Education symposium, for example, we speculated about the reasons for their limited outreach: Did the organizers feel that the symposium topic was so narrow, so tailored to specialists, that it did not need (or merit?) broad publicity?

5.8 Drafting this Report

Eventually, the weekly meetings developed a routine: we talked about upcoming *Brown* events and the team's coverage of them, and then discussed the previous week's events, potential interviews, and possible follow-up. The desire to comment on fieldnotes was dampened by the slow pace of their completion--no surprise, given the endless stream of events. Without fieldnotes to talk about, we would discuss the events and people more generally. For example, meeting notes from February 5, early in the spring semester, mention many names and events: "Teresa is talking to Imani," and "Rene wants to interview John McKinn." These conversations turned on planning and brainstorming, rather than the focused discussion of the content of fieldnotes that we had hoped for. The backlog of fieldnotes plagued the project throughout; indeed, two of the student ethnographers continued to write up fieldnotes well into the summer. By that time, however, with the drafting of this report well underway, the students were able to shape strategic fieldnotes with the structure of this report and its arguments in mind. Furthermore, Teresa was able to conduct interviews that addressed issues arising in the midst of composing this report. In sum, event—and time—management were difficult throughout, not surprising for a project that all team members had added to their lives with little planning or adjustment.

In addition to facing time constraints, the research team had failed to establish a clear consensus about the nature and technicalities of fieldnotes. Teresa remarked early on that she longed for "someone who would 'talk anthropology' to us and teach us about ethnographic fieldwork." Early fieldnotes like Rene's on Christopher Edley's talk in January were not uncommon: Rene's notes directly reported Edley's talk, almost to the point of transcription, with little discussion of the feel of the event itself—the ambiance of the room, the reactions of the audience, etc. Later team discussion and reading excerpts from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* by Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, helped student researchers to develop their own note-writing techniques, and to record more than just the information conveyed by speakers at events. Afterwards, in one of her fieldnotes, Rene wrote: "I typed most of this before I read the chapter on writing ethnographies. In the future, I plan on writing more about the people in the room, the mood, what elicited strong reactions, and less word-for-word detail. The chapter was helpful and I wish I would have read it sooner." Hindsight suggests that earlier reading about fieldnotes, and discussion of them, would have helped us. By March, we were devoting several sessions to sets of fieldnotes from each of the student ethnographers, discussing what kinds of fieldnotes were most effective and why. Through "workshopping" each person's fieldnotes, we hoped to develop a shared sense of the ideal fieldnote, one that Nicole, Paul, Rene and Teresa could keep in mind as they observed and wrote up events.

At the lowest points of the research process, the faculty members worried about whether the fieldnotes (and the backlog of unwritten notes) could support the book-length project, the student researchers were frustrated by the style and content of the weekly meetings, and the graduate students felt torn between the student researchers and the faculty. We emphasize that these frustrations reflect strains imposed by a collaborative project that suffered from little prior planning and overtaxed the lives of all involved. We also note, however, that we can trace some of these frustrations to the tension between collaborative and authoritative models of our process. If faculty members sought to rely on a collaborative model as much as possible, they also saw moments when they wanted or needed to direct others' work. If student members enjoyed and needed a measure of autonomy in deciding what to observe, they also sought guidance and direction from those with more experience and knowledge about ethnography, writing, and the university itself. Managing this tension between collaboration and authority could be difficult. As an example, we recall the meeting when Amy's collaborating graduate student told the student researchers not to jot down notes during interviews. Nancy hesitated for a moment (partly wanting to hold back), but intervened to say that she disagreed completely, that jotting down notes is often appreciated by interviewees and indispensable for producing later fieldnotes. Nancy left the meeting feeling conflicted: while she was confident that her advice (as a veteran ethnographer) was sound, she worried that she had usurped the authority of a graduate assistant. Similar tensions arose as we drafted this chapter: while we all agreed that the pretense of a project with no authority makes little sense, we nonetheless worried about how to indicate our shared sense of the enormous value of the research performed by our student researchers. In retrospect, it is no surprise that we struggled with these aspects of the project; after all, when faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students collaborate in this way, they defy university conventions of hierarchy and authority. This defiance doesn't mean,

however, that relations and structures of power are forgotten or effaced. Since EBC faculty had prior relationships with the student researchers as classroom teachers and undergraduate thesis advisors, and had served as both advisors to and employers of the graduate students, undergraduate and graduate student behaviors and actions could have material and psychic consequences. And as our discussion of the report's contents led with increasing confidence and inevitability to the production of a subsequent book, which promised publication credit to the student members of the team, these stakes became even greater. Clearly, the collaborative model came with strings attached. We recognize, as we look back, that we should have had more frequent and explicit conversations about how the project was transforming our relationships, and about how our expectations for the project were changing.

Despite these internal struggles, the group's shared commitment to the project deepened as the spring semester progressed. As the ethnographers produced more fieldnotes, themes began to emerge: the connections between the *Brown* Commemoration and the controversy on campus over Chief Illiniwek; the relationship between the community and the university; the role of Chancellor Cantor in issues of diversity; and the attempts to make *Brown* be more than just a black/white issue, among many others. As a consequence, instead of tossing around dozens of names and ideas, as we had done in earlier meetings, we discussed a few specific people, events, and themes in depth. In response to this development, and without explicit discussion, we reversed the order of the meeting agendas: we began with thoroughgoing discussion of the previous week's events and observations, rather than first talking about future events and scheduling. The insights that make up this report emerged and coalesced over the course of EBC's Spring 2004 meetings.

In chapter 1 we introduced the importance of "university register" to the ethnographic analysis we offer in this report. This theme emerged thanks to an early April visit with Hamilton College linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli. Urciuoli presented her own work, a study of "multiculturalism" at a liberal arts college, and discussed how educational institutions linguistically frame racial identity, and then read and commented on a selection of our fieldnotes. Urciuoli identified key moments of rupture in our fieldnotes by paying attention not just to their content, but also to how they showed people talking and acting. She asked us questions like, "How do people come to participate in these events?", "Who gets to talk?", and "Who talks first?" The idea of linguistic register influenced how our ethnographers thought about the speech they heard at events and in interviews, and it changed the way they observed events, wrote fieldnotes, and analyzed data. Moreover, it gave all members of the team a conceptual vocabulary with which they could discuss the fieldnotes, and provided a sense of direction and focus for shared analysis of the accumulating data.

As the end of the spring semester neared, we began to work with our focused sense of linguistic register and our growing cache of fieldnotes and interview notes to develop a deeper analysis of the commemorative year. During the month of April, the typical weekly meeting was spent discussing one or two events or sets of fieldnotes, and making connections between events and themes. For example, a conversation about Teresa's notes from the affirmative action event led us to return to discussion of the Chief and of what makes an event compelling for students, and then evolved into a conversation about which of the year's events attracted students and why. With only a month left in the

semester, we sought ways to produce or facilitate more of these productive discussions. Since conflicting schedules ruled out holding additional weekly meetings, we decided to return to WebBoard. By this point, our WebBoard space now housed dozens of fieldnotes, but we agreed to focus only on those the student ethnographers considered most important.

To develop and analyze these notes, we used the "comment" and "track changes" features in Microsoft Word. Team members would download a file containing a set of fieldnotes, revise and comment on them, and then post the revised file with comments as a reply to the original thread in WebBoard. While members of the group had used these features before to track changes on individual writing, to collaborate with another writer, or to comment on a student's paper, none of us had used them in the company of such a large group of reviewers. In short time, we produced long threads of documents including multiple reviewers' revisions and comments: since each reviewer was assigned a specific font color for comments and revisions, the documents began to resemble patchwork quilts. It took several weeks to get the hang of this: we wrestled with Microsoft Word to make sure that each person's comments would be registered in a different font color, and then hammered out a system of amending file names with a commenter's initials so that we could quickly register who had already commented. One session struck all of us as laughable, for it seemed that we did nothing other than discuss the technical matters of an online trail of identifiable edits. We all agree, however, that it was ironing out these details that allowed us to use the computer environment in a way suited to our needs.

This way of generating and recording what Nancy had long called "notes on notes" allowed us to continue conversations, ask questions, and remain engaged between the weekly meetings. Most often, comments weighed in to agree with the importance of a particular point, ask for more information, make connections to another event or larger theme, and provide further insight. In notes on the interview with Tom Ulen, Teresa indicated that she asked Ulen about the impact of the *Brown* Commemoration. She recorded the following as his answer: "He believes that *Brown* is a hugely heightening experience. He hopes lasting links will arise, student interest will increase, and that seeds will be planted for joint work across campus disciplines. 'We'll see.' He has met new people from both the campus and the greater community. Had he not been in this position he would have missed a great deal of interest. Issues of racial justice were of strong interest to him in the 50's and 60's. Since then he has been consumed with career and family but the *Brown* Commemoration has stirred memories from those times." Rene picked up on Ulen's hope that "student interest will increase" and asked Teresa, "In what ways have we seen this happen? One great example is Teresa being a part of Dialogues on Diversity because of the Affirmative Action debate." Mark, meanwhile, focused on the goals of renewal and commented, "What are the implications of framing this in terms of 'renewal' v. 'new commitment, new strategies, etc.'? Strikes me the spirit may need to be different." In the next meeting, both of these comments spawned further discussion about student involvement and what inspires it. In the meeting notes from April 28, 2004, we could see that these comments encouraged us to think of examples of student involvement over the *Brown* year and to talk about different ways that students feel inspired. These comments then moved us to discuss generational perspectives on activism. "Notes on notes" thus gave us starting points for more detailed discussions and analysis.

As the group gathered steam over the course of the spring semester, we began to imagine report/book themes and even an occasional chapter; we mostly spoke of a book, understanding that this report would cull writing from the in-process book. But themes and sketchy chapter ideas make neither a report nor a book, and, as Imani Bazzell remarked in the prior chapter, "You can't take potential to the bank." Three insights guided our process of managing and distilling the notes and ideas to create this report. First, even though we had been telling ourselves that this ethnography was about much more than the *Brown* Commemoration, only as we began to think concretely about the subsequent book did we realize that our work was foremost an ethnography of a year, and more specifically of a major university's struggles over race. We made the decision to lead the book with a chapter on the larger currents in the year, and hence to deeply contextualize the *Brown* Commemoration.

Like the first insight, the second one also speaks to a question that had been vexing the faculty members of the team for already several months. It had become clear to the faculty that the team's richest data on student participation in the *Brown* year featured the group's own student ethnographers. For several months this troubled faculty on two counts: first, because they had hoped to document and follow a larger number of student participants; and second, because they worried about the awkward problem of featuring the student researchers themselves as "objects" of study. Specifically, the faculty wondered whether this would in some way diminish the students' role as researchers. Faculty members decided, finally, that the student researchers are rich examples of the student audience for *Brown* events and related programming. Therefore, they saw no conflict between their role as paid ethnographers generating the notes, and participants in the *Brown* Commemoration. Further, the group learned to accept the inevitable confusion of research subject and object: just as EBC was itself both studying the *Brown* year and a component of it, so too were the student ethnographers both researchers and research objects for the purposes of this report and the book manuscript to follow.

The third insight grew from a return to the question that had concerned EUI coordinators before they consented to form EBC: as a group, we had to ask ourselves where and how we would feature all of the *Brown* events that we had been cataloging all year. Over the months we began to realize that it was moments of disruption, of rupture, that interested us most: the decision to focus our writing on those moments was sealed, perhaps, by Bonnie Urciuoli, whose interest in linguistic registers provided both a license and a framework for narrowing our coverage.

Near the end of the spring semester, the faculty team members met twice to discuss the book project and name the central insights to be featured in this report—appreciating, of course, that these insights were a long time in coming. Thus, by the time the six-person writing team (Amy, Bill, Mark, Nancy, Peter, and Teresa) sat down in May 2004 for a concentrated week of authoring, we had already generated a working outline of the book that served, with only slight rearrangement, as the basis for this report. During this week, we broke into writing teams of two and began to flesh out sections of chapters 1 and 2 of this report. Interestingly, each pair of writing partners worked differently, and each represented a different kind of partnership: an undergraduate researcher and a faculty member (Teresa and Bill), a graduate student and a faculty member (Amy and Nancy), and two faculty members (Peter and Mark). These pairs gathered periodically in a single classroom to review progress and chart the course of the chapters. We decided to

continue to use WebBoard, and added a new conference, "Book," to which the writing pairs posted their drafts. The computer remained a critical writing tool as we mined the WebBoard repository of fieldnotes. If we walked away from the first week with a pretty clear sense of the eventual shape of the report, we also recognized that many tasks remained, and that there would be a great deal of stitching together and editing in our collective future.

In late July, however, when we were scheduled to spend another week on concentrated co-writing, some of this original confidence began to ebb. Although each pair had agreed to continue writing in the interim period leading up to this meeting, none of the pairs had finished its work. Instead, the teams used the scheduled week to catch up on their writing commitments, and then gathered for two intense group sessions concentrating on chapters 1 and 3 of the report: it seemed clear that we needed this time together if we were to create a coherent document. Less than a month later, we reconvened on August 23 for a group writing session on chapter 2, which had been drafted in three sections by three different pairs. We met again for long sessions in October and in early November; at each session we read prose on screen together, sometimes providing brief commentary and approval, and sometimes seeking to help the writers move from rough ideas to full-fledged argument and interpretation.

Many readers who have worked on a group project will agree, we suspect, that it is hard to apportion work evenly while moving the project along in a timely fashion. People work and write at different paces and with different styles; meanwhile, everyone is already too busy. At the aforementioned July meeting—the one that had been scheduled for a week, but was pared down to two afternoons—members of the group cautiously began to voice frustrations. Peter felt overwhelmed with other university responsibilities, among them the maintenance and support of EUI. Nancy, meanwhile, reported ambivalence about her role as the organizer of the report effort, the one who prodded people to keep their promises and sketched out the collaborative writing process. To Nancy, it seemed that if she didn't do this work nobody else would, but she also wondered if she wielded too heavy a hand. The group, meanwhile, believes that this chapter should reveal Nancy's role, for better or for worse, so as to reveal the difficulty of expediting a group project that could otherwise easily languish.

The sentences that comprise this report are collaborative products: they draw from fieldnotes that in some cases bear the commentary of nine people, and they have been edited and re-edited by many hands. Further, it bears the imprint of comments offered by Rene and Nicole, who had moved away from Champaign-Urbana at the end of Spring 2004. And there are also the many conversations that colored the original notes and this report's analysis. Throughout the revision process, we gathered feedback from readers outside of the nine co-authors. During the fall, we shared drafts with colleagues and interviewees, and in January 2005 we met with the members of the EBC steering committee who had read a preliminary draft. All of their feedback and insights have made an impact on the writing of this report. We have penned this report in the hopes that it will serve as another draft of the subsequent book. That book will be strengthened by your reading and the responses you send our way.