

**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**

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

In the 2003-2004 academic year, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign hosted an extensive "Jubilee Commemoration" of the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI) was commissioned to document the commemoration, which brought nationally and internationally renowned civil rights figures and many others to campus and sparked continuing dialogue and initiatives. Our report of this extraordinary commemoration is remarkable in that it is the product of undergraduate student researchers who reflect on significant attempts by their university to increase and honor diversity during a time of considerable conflict and controversy on campus. To capture the feel of this year, students attended events, took field notes, interviewed key stakeholders in the *Brown* Commemoration, and recorded their own reactions. This report was written with the collaboration of the then faculty directors of EUI, one additional faculty member, a graduate student, and one of the undergraduate researchers. It documents key events of the commemoration, records reactions to those events, and reflects on the process and potentials of undergraduate student research. From these efforts we have distilled seven recommendations to improve campus climate and programming on race and diversity topics.

1. Participants in dialogues on race and diversity should "bring it home" by addressing race and diversity as they pertain to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
2. Programming on race and diversity topics should not shy away from intellectual and emotional discomfort as such programming provokes change in how people think.
3. Programming on race and diversity topics should be integrated into the daily routines of campus living, learning, and working if it is expected to produce lasting change. Such integrated programming is often expensive, and so should be made a budget priority as the university plans for its future.
4. To increase the likely efficacy of programs treating the issues of race and diversity, students should be given substantive roles in planning efforts.
5. Many campus units sponsored *Brown* Commemoration events, including some that were relatively new to dialogues on race and diversity. This broad sponsorship should be sustained and not allowed to narrow to just those units directly charged with addressing diversity issues on campus.
6. Dialogues on race and racism should contribute not only to a stronger multiracial campus community, but also to a multiracial society. Toward this end, programming that articulates with concerns of the Champaign-Urbana community should be encouraged.
7. In the February 16, 2007 press release announcing that Chief Illiniwek is no longer to be used as an athletic symbol of the university, Board of Trustees Chair Lawrence Eppley stated, "It will be important now to ensure the accurate recounting and safekeeping of the tradition as an integral part of the history of the University." Our research on the *Brown* Commemoration year suggests many constituencies should be included in planning the accurate recounting of the history of Chief Illiniwek.

## 2.0 Introduction

In the academic year 2003-04, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign hosted a year-long, comprehensive “Jubilee Commemoration” of *Brown v. Board of Education* (hereafter “*Brown*”), the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision on school desegregation. On- and off-campus units and individuals were invited to apply for Jubilee Commemoration funding to support events, performances, lectures, readings, films, and exhibits. This initiative resulted in hundreds of events that were, in turn, supplemented by many unofficial but related gatherings. The U of I’s effort stands as perhaps the most extensive attempt by a U.S. university to launch a comprehensive conversation on race and diversity through the commemoration of *Brown*. As a supplement to this enormous effort, campus administrators decided to study the commemoration itself: hence the genesis of the Ethnography of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Jubilee Commemoration—EBC for short. EBC, a 10-person research collaborative comprised of undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty, used ethnographic methods including sustained participant observation, interviews, and field research to study both the public life of the Commemoration year and the campus’s broader “dialogue” on race and diversity. The EBC charge was a very open one, stipulating only a preliminary report due by mid-November, 2004. The decision to close this expanded report with recommendations is our own.

EBC was born of both serendipity and careful vision. Serendipity arrived in the form of a campus visitor from the National Science Foundation, who happened to meet on the same day in the autumn of 2003 with members of the *Brown* Commemoration Planning Committee and organizers of the Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI, then EOTU, the Ethnography of the University). She concluded that individuals involved in the two campus-wide initiatives would do well to contemplate the possibility of EUI documenting *Brown*. The careful vision can be credited to the *Brown* Commemoration Planning Committee, and to then-Chancellor Nancy Cantor and then-Provost Richard Herman, who jointly charged the *Brown* Committee. Further, Cantor had designated EUI as one of several Cross Campus Initiatives meant to spur inquiry across disciplinary boundaries, and provided funding to initiate its work. Together, she and committee members envisioned how EUI’s commitment to undergraduate research and to serious, reflective institutional self-examination could result in both documentation and interpretation of the year-long campus effort. Consequently, EUI was commissioned to compose a team that would study the *Brown* Commemoration year. EUI agreed to this arrangement with the understanding that undergraduates—compensated for their time—would be the project’s primary ethnographers. In October 2003, a group of four undergraduates, two graduate students, and four faculty members set to work observing, interviewing, discussing, and writing.

Many months into this project in Spring 2004, the EBC team had an “a-ha” moment—which came, fittingly, immediately after a group interview with Chancellor Cantor. In that moment, we recognized that we were not outsiders studying the *Brown* Commemoration, but instead a critical part of the Commemoration itself. Although we had learned day by day that the commemoration meant many things to its various constituents, it was, by original intent, an ambitious effort to engineer a campus dialogue on race and diversity. Chancellor Cantor developed this point several times during the

interview, and, as we left the Swanlund Administration Building, we could not help but realize that the commemoration had mobilized us as an instance of the larger *Brown* vision—a group of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty engaged in a nearly year-long dialogue on race and diversity on our campus. This report, then, is in large part the product of our own dialogue, which is one thread among many of the Commemoration and draws from a number of strands of campus conversation.

By the time EBC was ready to begin drafting this report, with seven months of undergraduate ethnography behind us, we had amassed an online database containing a wealth of fieldnotes, namely the student ethnographers' reports on *Brown* events as well as interviews and other research-related observations and activities. The web-archived fieldnotes, ranging from two to eight pages per entry, were then commented on in writing by all of the members of the EBC research team. These documents became rich conversations in their own right, commanding copious responses, criticisms, connections, and queries.

We want to underscore that this report is not a program evaluation: in these pages we do not proclaim the success or denounce the failure of the *Brown* Commemoration. We do, however, take seriously the *Brown* year's ambitious goal: to spearhead a campus-wide "dialogue" on race at the university. Such a dialogue is hard to capture, let alone quantify; harder still is the matter of gauging what sort of difference such a dialogue might make, or how it might transform the university. We do aim in this report to listen and look in on meaningful and productive moments of the *Brown* year. At the same time, we try to remain alert to unrealized potential and even profound disappointment. We understand that "effects" are hard to pin down. Indeed, the effects are still in the making on a campus that continues to struggle with the challenges of race and inequality.

The first chapter of our report, "Beyond the University as Usual," draws from the public face of the *Brown* year—its public events. We argue that a productive campus dialogue on race and diversity emerged from those *Brown* moments in which "business as usual" at the university was challenged. We organize those challenges to what we call "the university register" (i.e., its prevailing ideas) in two rhetorical categories. In the chapter's first section, "The Grammar of Race," we consider moments in the *Brown* events that exposed, questioned, or disrupted the logic of race. We highlight strategies employed by both speakers and audience members that expose unarticulated rules and patterns underlying the representations of race in the contemporary university. In the second section of chapter 1, "Bringing It Home," we examine how speakers and audiences at many events worked to bring the issues of diversity and race home to the U of I community, including the university itself, the cities of Champaign and Urbana, the city of Chicago and its suburbs that many undergraduates call home, and the state of Illinois. Verbal acts of "bringing it home" violated the university's conventional discourse, in which people talk about social objects and relations external to the university in objective and distant terms. These challenging and disruptive moments charged participants to acknowledge that these are our issues, and that this is our reality, and called on them to confront race and grapple with it in their own lives.

Chapter 2, "Upon Reflection: Envisioning, Experiencing, and Acting on the *Brown* Year," draws from conversations about the year's commemorative events, some of them formal interviews, some of them small talk made in fleeting moments. In turn, the chapter is structured to produce a conversation between the planners and producers of the year

and its various audiences. Just as we show that the architects of the year responded to the commemoration in different ways, so do we highlight the enormous diversity of *Brown* audiences. In the chapter's first section, "The Producers," we draw from conversations with key figures in the *Brown* year, specifically Chancellor Nancy Cantor and the Organizing Committee Co-chairs Susan Fowler and Tom Ulen. We call them "producers" metaphorically to highlight the role Cantor, Fowler, and Ulen played in gathering the resources and delegating the tasks of the commemoration. In cinematic terms, they actually served as "executive producers," while "line producers" in the various units across campus implemented the organizing committee's collective vision. We thus examine how the commemoration's architects imagined both the year and its effects on the campus and community, and highlight the distinctive ways in which each of them understood the meaning of "dialogue" and "university transformation." In "The Next Generation," we report student analyses of what this year meant—and did not mean—to them. In "Summoning Students," we consider how *Brown* events called on students as either the generation that had abandoned the mantle of civil rights struggles or as the hope of future efforts. We reflect upon the radical differences and comparative efficacies of these calls as they attempted to motivate this next generation to organize and act. "Answering the Call" follows a handful of students who acted on the *Brown* year in some concrete way. Exceptional as these students may be, they have helped us think about what it means for a campus to engage seriously the lived campus experience of race and diversity. Finally, in "Students Connecting around Controversy," we turn to the fabric of student conversation during the daily life of the *Brown* year. Here we examine informal conversation about the commemoration that does not necessarily produce events or new social groups, but nonetheless "makes a difference." In the chapter's third section, "Rethinking the University through *Brown*," we follow a number of people both in and beyond the university who reflected on the commemoration, the relationship between the university and its communities, and the university itself. " 'You Can't Take Potential to the Bank,' " introduces evaluations of the commemoration itself. In " 'Maybe I Have to Write the Book Myself,' " we highlight the voices of those attending and participating in commemoration events who took to heart *Brown*'s stated interest in reaching out to the community. Our interlocutors are eloquent on the promise and, alas, more often than not on the failures of that ambition. In " 'And Hell, This Is a Public Institution,' " we observe how reflections on the *Brown* commemoration and university-community relations engage the very *raison d'être* of the university itself.

Chapter 3, "The ABCs of EBC," offers our own story, which we tell as yet another window for gaining perspective on the university. We consider the EBC story worth telling for several reasons. We appreciate that collaborative ethnographic work is rare—and rarer still when it brings together undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. As we wrote this report, particularly chapter 1, we came to appreciate that EBC itself, however modestly, mounted its own challenge to university business as usual. In the course of our research, we could not find an example of a collaborative ethnographic study authored by a diverse group of undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty—people with quite different investments in the university register. We quickly learned, however, that such an intimate collaboration proved essential because the *Brown* year was an exhausting whirlwind of events, exhibits, and performances. The sheer number and breadth of events organized by the campus community overwhelmed the student

ethnographers, and the EBC team knew from our first day, a month after the commemoration had begun, that we would never be able to “capture” *Brown* in full. As time passed, however, we had enough of a sense for the landscape of the year that we could “register” what stood out, and what differentiated those moments that enabled dialogue to go beyond facile mention of diversity to serious reflection on the still-salient topics of living with racism and its legacies.

The EBC story also has much to contribute to considerations of the technical aspects of collaborative research. EBC took shape through a number of web-based technologies that have affected the course and nature of the project. Indeed, we argue that technologies are a critical part of collaborative ethnographic research and writing. In this chapter we are candid about our shortcomings because we hope that projects resembling EBC might take root and succeed on other campuses. In underscoring these shortcomings, we want to consider what about the university register, its “business as usual” mode makes projects like this one difficult to execute. The chapter begins by introducing “The Ethnography of the University Initiative,” then reviews the history of the *Brown* Commemoration ethnography in two sections, “From EUI to EBC” and “The Research Team.” Finally, in “The Day to Day of Student Ethnography,” we examine the logistical, technical, and managerial aspects of the project. “Drafting this Report” concludes the chapter, reviewing how this collaboratively authored report took shape.

It is critical to underscore that our ethnography captures only a fraction of *Brown* events: local readers may be disappointed by what is not here. We attended events selectively, and in turn have documented them selectively here. Further, while there is some method to our selection of which events to attend and which to feature here, there is also an element of chance, dictated by the passions or interests of one or another ethnographer, the happenstance of schedules, the lack of accessible information on the timing of *Brown* events, and the tastes of our writing team. With its resolutely local lens, ethnography is necessarily partial: the ethnographer attends one event and misses another; she talks to one person rather than another; her attention is drawn to one corner of the room and not another, and so on. The hubris of ethnography, however, is that the accretion of events, moments, and conversations leads to observations and analyses that move past anecdotal reportage toward recognition of embedded social structures and ideologies. In this spirit, the best ethnography is necessarily long-term: unfortunately, as chapter 3 documents in considerable detail, the ethnographic research that comprises this report was begun hastily and conducted by undergraduates with full course loads, and directed by faculty and graduate students who were not relieved of any of their regular university duties. One of the commentators on an earlier draft of this report charged us with “drive-by ethnography,” calling attention to the partial and perhaps hurried nature of the project. In response, chapter 3 offers both a discussion of the project’s limits and a call for more sustained and well-planned collaborative ethnographic projects of this sort. Chapter 3 also introduces the wish list of activities we had hoped to include but could not because of time or logistical constraints. We had wanted to spend more time with the many people who for whatever reason had absolutely nothing to do with the *Brown* year; we had planned to follow up on more of the project proposals that were not funded by the *Brown* Committee; we had intended to trace the paths of individuals or groups who were in one way or another touched by *Brown* events. Long as our list of unfulfilled desires

and ambitions may be, we nonetheless believe that this report of what we did observe, discuss, and analyze remains valuable.

Readers of this report will also recognize that it embodies a distinct point of view: drawing on events, conversations, and interviews, this is necessarily an interpretive work. We have made sense of our materials through our own particular lenses. The fieldnotes themselves are colored by these lenses, as were the many on- and off-line discussions we had about our data. Far from being hasty, the interpretations offered here are the result of substantial labor; in some cases, single interpretive sentences have been culled from hours of conversation about a single, brief moment at an event. Because the report draws from the work of ten people, and from a six-person writing team, it is very hard to assign the “we” of the writing to one or another person’s particular subjectivity; this said, however, we are happy to claim the report as a subjective venture and to acknowledge that the interpretations are informed by ‘who we are.’ In “The Research Team” in Chapter 3, we introduce some aspects of those subjectivities and explain how we undertook, at the micro-level, the processes of interpretation that resulted in this report. At this moment, we want to emphasize the fact that four undergraduate students—Rene Bangert, Paul Davis, Nicole Ortégón, and Teresa Ramos—did all the ethnographic fieldwork; further, Teresa participated in all subsequent discussions and writing leading to this report.

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

Business as usual with respect to race at the university presented an irony. The *Brown* year resulted in many campus conversations about the value of diversity, but a dearth of dialogue about the many unsettling aspects of race and inequality in the contemporary United States. We suggest that this irony speaks to our historical moment. In 2003, the *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* decisions on admissions at the University of Michigan affirmed the high court’s 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision, in which Justice Powell wrote that educational diversity is a compelling state interest. While the *Grutter* and *Gratz* decisions supported diversity as a



primary value in higher education that contributes to an institutional brand of excellence, they also narrowly tailored the role race can play in admissions decisions. The Supreme Court represented educational diversity as an asset for corporate and military America, but emptied the term of any meaningful reference to historical inequities and injustices. As if to attest to that emptying, when the Supreme Court issued a decision in 2007 striking down desegregation plans of school districts in Seattle, Washington and Louisville, Kentucky, every justice on the bench, whether in the majority or the dissenting minority, declared that their position represented the fulfillment of *Brown*. In short, there is much that the *Brown* decision and the various and disparate ways it has been commemorated, cited, and memorialized, can tell us about ourselves, our values, and our continuing quest for social justice.

### 3.0 Beyond the University as Usual

This chapter details how the *Brown* Commemoration attempted to challenge what we call “business as usual” at the university. As it defied the norms of the university’s discourse on diversity and race, the commemoration also challenged the received practices and discourses of the university—its larger “register.” We consider how both the message (what is said) as well as the medium (the frames in which messages are articulated) matter, and we note the potential for change in universities at those moments when something about the “university as usual” has been challenged, when people step outside of their prescribed roles as students, knowledge-holders, lecturers, or audiences into unexpected territory. We suggest that for a productive dialogue on diversity and race to emerge, the university must—at least intermittently and in some spaces—feel different: it must become the home for an unruly, sometimes emotional and contentious, family.

Rather than providing an exhaustive definition of the normative university register, we call attention to instances when people recognized that “business as usual” had in some way been violated. To oversimplify slightly, the normative university register on race we take up here is two-fold: first, in its academic mode, it asserts that knowledge is objective, established and shared, and therefore, not usually controversial; second, it celebrates a comfortable diversity which, we argue, can sometimes take on the look of color-blindness (i.e., the idea that race no longer matters). We consider these two default positions in this chapter’s two sections, “The Grammar of Race” and “Bringing it Home.” We name these to examine the *Brown* year’s most provocative and challenging moments when the realities of race relations were laid bare; we describe instances when “the grammar of race” was revealed in unsettling ways, and when speakers attempted to “bring things home” to their audiences. Featured in this chapter is the public face of the *Brown* year: the events themselves. Although we want to understand the potentially transformative dialogues that took place away from formal *Brown* events, we are also committed to fine-grained analysis of moments during formal events that revealed the routines of daily life at the university. While we subject these operations to critique, we also recognize our own implication in them: we participate in similar operations daily as faculty members and students, and some of our activities during and after the *Brown* year embody university “business as usual,” and rely on well-entrenched registers of university discourse, as well. Using ethnographic detail to record the talk and feeling of *Brown* events, we aim to set the scene in sufficient detail that our readers can intervene in our analysis, perhaps to extend or question our own meaning-making. We thus invite our readers to place themselves here, as we grapple with what can make a difference in the attempt to foster a campus and society-wide discussion of race and diversity.

At issue throughout this report is “what works.” We do not, for example, assert that all challenges to the university’s business as usual are productive. In fact, we leave open the possibility that some disruptions of the university register may, in fact, stop dialogue, rather than facilitate new ways to talk about diversity and race. All the same, we observe that those instances violating “business as usual” at the university were usually the very times when engagement peaked.

### 3.1 The Grammar of Race

In this section, we consider moments in the *Brown* events that exposed, challenged, or disrupted the logic of race in order to comment in various ways on the conventional use of race in speech at the American university. We call the four strategies people used in response to the perceived status quo on race relations reversing, ridiculing, resisting, and emptying. By “reversing” race, we mean those moments in which people substituted one racial group for another in order to expose the complexities and violence behind the discourse of race and its effects. “Ridiculing” race describes moments where race was taken to its extreme as a way to reveal the absurdities of its logic and meanings in U.S. society. We call those moments when participants denied stereotypes instances of “resisting” race. Whereas denying a stereotype depends on active contradiction, “emptying” race names the strategy of questioning whether race is the issue most pertinent to the discussion at hand. Taken together, these strategies expose a grammar of race, which we define as the patterns and unarticulated rules underlying the practices that represent race in the contemporary American university.

#### 3.1.1 Reversing Race

“Conversations in Black and *Brown*,” a November event organized by Cynthia Oliver, an assistant professor of dance, presented a five-person panel discussion on race and dance in the United States. One of the panel members, Dianne McIntyre, was in residence as a visiting choreographer to guide a group of students in a dance performance in response to the legacy of the *Brown* decision. She described her good fortune in having attended an integrated school with a diverse faculty and student body while many of her contemporaries were bused to white schools where “they were isolated, eating lunch, playing at recess and going to the bathroom at different times than the white students.” McIntyre began her dance career in an integrated after-school dance group, where she came to think of modern dance as black dance. The audience burst into laughter when she described thinking in college “that it was nice that all these white people wanted to learn a black form of dancing.” Later, when the floor was opened to questions and comments, the conversation turned to the ways in which some art forms are associated with particular races. At issue was the larger question of artistic ownership: does art “belong” to one or another racial group, and who in turn is “allowed” to participate in what art forms? Laughter erupted again when McIntyre related how she replied to an invitation to join “Dance Black America”: “Only when there is a ‘Dance White America.’”

With her reference to “Dance White America” and to modern dance as “black dance,” McIntyre surprised her audience by reversing conventional racial associations. In order to think about how McIntyre exposed prevailing racial logic, we need to recall the audience response: resounding laughter. What made these moments humorous was the unexpected substitution of white for black, and black for white. During McIntyre’s frank recollection of her early college encounter with whites learning modern dance, audience response was heightened by her admission that she had no idea that her understanding of modern dance as “black” ran against the grain of common associations and beliefs about race in America. When McIntyre disclosed the terms she used to refuse the offer to join

“Dance Black America,” the audience laughed with her because, in the logic of race in America, things “white” go unnamed. Further, as Teresa suggested in an edit to this chapter, the audience is jarred because they think, “That’ll never happen; there will probably never be a ‘Dance White America.’” “By reversing white and black, McIntyre challenged the audience to register the racial grammar of our times in which the majority remains racially unmarked. As they laughed, members of the audience were led to encounter this unspoken racial logic and to register what makes “Dance White America” funny or jarring.

In an October meeting with white film director Frederick Marx, the logic of race was similarly spotlighted by an audience remark. Marx joined students at the Allen Hall Unit One Living and Learning Community for “*Hoop Dreams* Hoopla,” a discussion of his 1994 award-winning documentary, *Hoop Dreams*, which follows two African American high school students in Chicago who aspire to play professional basketball. During the discussion session that followed a public screening of the film the day before, a thirty-something African American woman who introduced herself as being from the community commented that she thought it would be interesting to see how an African American would do a documentary on a white family. In response, Marx turned the hypothetical to his own family, imagining them as the object of such a documentary, and remarked that he “would never let anyone do a documentary on him, except maybe Arthur Agee and William Gates,” the two boys featured in his own film. This question forced Marx to reveal his own racial logic, and to reflect on his own unquestioned willingness to make a documentary about two African American boys while admitting that he would never submit himself, a white man in a position of relative privilege, to the scrutiny of the camera’s eye. Of course, the decision to be the subject of a documentary is more than a racial matter, but there was no question that race was in the room during this conversation.

Earlier in the evening, Teresa had challenged Marx about his decision to donate some of the film’s proceeds to the boys. Marx told her that he would have liked to have given the boys full ownership rights to the film, but NCAA regulations prevented them from benefiting financially from any activity related to playing basketball. Teresa then asked Marx whether he would have felt as passionately about making sure a white middle-class family benefited from the success of a movie that featured them. Marx answered “yes,” but noted that “the money might have meant more to a poor family.” In an aside in her fieldnotes, Teresa questioned whether any speaker would have been comfortable answering any way other than “yes” to such a query: “The question I asked him next was of a sensitive nature and I am not sure I could have received an honest answer no matter whom I asked.” To answer “no,” Teresa reflected, would have been to admit participation in a racial logic that imagines African Americans as the recipients of white charity. In Teresa’s view, Marx’s affirmative reply, to the extent that it implies the claim that race did not matter in the compensation of documentary subjects, becomes complicated as he asserts the significance of economic class by saying the money would mean more to a poor family. Such an assertion may be substituting class for race rather than acknowledging the connections between them. In her comments, Teresa ruminated on this reversal, noting that race likely did matter in Marx’s calculations, just as it probably had in his answer to the question about whether he would consent to being the subject of a documentary. As a group, however, we were unable to find stable answers to

questions about the motivations for making “Hoop Dreams,” its choice of subjects, and its calculus of imagined compensations. Mark, for example, was inclined to take Marx’s reply to Teresa at face value, and called attention to Teresa’s skepticism as a potential site for analysis. Rather than referee the merit of these and other claims that arose in our discussions, we prefer to underscore the difficulties inherent in discussions of race, and the potential for pitfalls in relying on the strategy of reversing race.

At an event hosted by the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES), Blannie Bowen, an African American professor of agricultural education from Pennsylvania State University, insisted that race did matter as he challenged students and faculty to think about what it would be like if whites were a racial minority. Bowen focused his comments on the unique challenges of diversifying colleges of agriculture, which often remain bastions of whiteness in the university. In answer to a query about how to remedy the “chilly climate” for students and faculty of color at the University of Illinois, Bowen asked his audience to expose themselves to cultural differences. Without a trace of irony, he invited them to “have fun,” and then asked them to stretch their imaginations: “Imagine going into a situation where you are the only white person. . . . How often are whites in situations where they are the minority? What would be the effect if this happened more often? What would have happened if, after the *Brown* decision, a few whites went to all black schools? Would they have lost out on their identity, would they feel uncomfortable, face discrimination, etc?” With these hypothetical reversals, Bowen challenged audience members, most of whom were white, to consider how a white minority would respond to a potentially indifferent or even hostile environment if the tables were turned, and thereby called on them to think more aggressively about how to redress the university’s racial status quo.

In the above instances, challenges to the racial status quo were mobilized in “black” and “white.” Less frequently, other noteworthy *Brown* moments disrupted this racial binary with other substitutions. For example, at another Allen Hall event, Ben Cox, an original black Freedom Rider and preacher, addressed over twenty people in a room that Teresa described as “a classroom with very comfortable desks, carpeted floors, and cubically stacked carpeted boxes for students to sit on.” Teresa characterized the tone of the event this way: “The room quiets down as the staff member introduces Ben Cox. It is now quiet to the point that I can hear the hum of the electricity going through the room. The person who introduced Cox notes that he was active in the civil rights movement, was jailed 17 times and spent some time in solitary confinement. Everyone is listening, stern-faced, quiet. An African American girl is taking notes, as is the Latino sitting next to her.” Thus we see that Cox’s authority as a historical figure, activist, and preacher was quickly established, and that the student attendants were eager to listen: this authority, as well as a measure of urgency, had also been established by the event’s plain-speaking title: “The Unfinished Business of Civil Rights: What Can We Do?”

Only moments later, however, Cox established an informal rapport with the students, and soon the audience was laughing. Teresa recorded, “I cannot help but smile when his eyes focus on mine. He is one of those people who could smile saying anything. He is a very happy man, even when he said, ‘and a white man spit in my eye, and all my anger, upbringing, non-violent learning swelled up in me.’ He is a preacher, a very charming man. He blinks, though, as if blinking back the pain that the telling of his memories invokes. He is not giving a speech. He is just speaking.” Over the course of the *Brown*

year, some events distinguished themselves from others by refusing to conform to conventional academic formats and registers—a point we address at more length in the following chapter. By remarking that Cox was “just speaking” instead of “giving a speech,” Teresa had registered the unusually comfortable, informal, and conversational tone of the event, as well as its impact.

This informal register, however, in no way stopped Cox from tackling the hard issues, foremost the right of all people to fight discrimination. As he put it, “If someone discriminates, you ought to holler as loud as you can. . . . The real crime is to be discriminated against and to walk away silently.” Students laughed moments later when Cox brought this home with an example of race reversal in which whites charged him with discrimination: “I taught some white kids and failed them. They said I did it ‘cause I was black.” Teresa noticed that “the African American woman/student sitting in front of me chuckled, lowering and shaking her head,” and speculated that “I think she probably was laughing because it is the typical ‘reverse racism’ response, and I think she was shocked because this response can be interpreted as an insult to Cox’s morals. That white students are so ignorant as to think that they are equally discriminated against by blacks.” Sidestepping the obvious question—whether or not the white students were justified in their complaints—Cox was instead highlighting their right as whites to level the charge of discrimination, their right to holler. When a student called on Cox to clarify his comment, he shifted gears and responded, “If a gay or lesbian were being discriminated against, I would walk a picket line with them even though I don’t believe their beliefs.” By telling the anecdote of the white students in his class, Cox was reversing race as McIntyre, Bowen, and Marx had done. As he addressed discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, Cox extended his defense of the right to holler against discrimination, even if it is whites who think they are being discriminated against. By explicitly stating his support for the gay and lesbian movement (in spite of his personal objection to their “beliefs”), Cox challenged a conventional racial grammar in which blacks occupy a privileged position as those discriminated against, although the problem of discrimination against whites was far from heading his concerns. When an Allen Hall resident advisor followed with a question about discrimination against women, Cox answered, “When I see women out jogging with a dog, I see injustice.” Understanding a woman who jogs with a dog out of fear as an object of discrimination, Cox again extended the struggle of discrimination beyond race.

### **3.1.2 Ridiculing Race**

If moments of racial reversal exposed the grammar of race, racial ridicule called explicit attention to the absurdity of that grammar. For example, in the event we just described, Cox ridiculed racial logic as a way to warm up his audience. Teresa described these early moments of his conversation this way: “Very sporadic, sometimes it flows from one thought to the next, sometimes he pauses for 5 to 15 seconds before he starts up a new topic, which is different from the previous but related to civil rights. . . . He asks a question and looks directly at a student, ‘If you were dying would it matter whose blood you had?’ . . . If I was dying, I’d say, ‘Give me blood, give me blood!’ There is more laughing; it is a quiet laughter, a hearty yet low laughter.” The hearty laughter acknowledged the absurdity of racial discrimination on one’s deathbed.

While Cox exposed the absurdity of racial discrimination by posing a hypothetical question, Paul Finkelman, Chapman Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of

Tulsa College Of Law, did the same work by reciting historical facts. Finkelman, who is white, offered a seemingly unending list of the grotesque laws and practices comprising the legacy of the American Jim Crow era. Nicole and Rene both recognized Finkelman's strategy of letting the list speak for itself, thus letting the absurdity emerge with little commentary. Rene noted that people in the audience were "shaking their heads at the injustices." The inanity of the "facts," though, did not stop Finkelman from reaching, as Cox did, into the realm of hypothetical absurdities, as when, in mentioning the segregation of libraries, he spoke of people's fears that books for blacks and whites "may have dated over the summer." At this the crowd burst into laughter.

Finkelman used the absurd sporadically and strategically as he sketched the differences between the United States fifty years ago and today, between a segregated and a desegregated society. After the comment about "books dating," Finkelman mentioned segregation at schools for the blind, where "there were separate campuses, perhaps created in fear that a black student might stumble into a white student or vice versa, posing a threat to the entire system." Again, the audience laughed. Later, after pointing out that taxes, too, were segregated, he asked, "Who knows what would have happened if the names were together in the same book?" Finkelman cited the many rigid boundaries so prevalent in segregated society in order to ridicule them. By seeing these once-common boundaries through a present-day lens, he pointed out the absurdity of widespread attitudes about race and seemed to be asking, "What were people so afraid of?"

Other speakers exposed the absurdity of the grammar of race by transporting its logic to non-racial situations. This was precisely what Christopher Edley did in his comments on the logic supporting popular opposition to affirmative action. Edley wanted to underscore the absurdity of the claim made by some whites that affirmative action denies them opportunity. To show that this position "just does not correspond to reality," he offered the following hypothetical: "It is like going to the mall on a Saturday afternoon. You drive and drive around the parking lot, when you see the handicapped space, you think that if only it wasn't a handicapped spot you could have it. However, the spot would have been taken already if it was not set aside for someone else." This parable typifies the rhetorical strategy of displacement: race was not reversed, but instead replaced by another domain, as a means of ridiculing an underlying rationale. Speakers used such transpositions of the grammar of race in the hopes of helping their listeners grasp the absurdities of racial (il)logics.

### **3.1.3 Resisting Race**

While both reversing race and ridiculing race refer to moments when the speakers called attention to race, resisting race describes a common and more directly confrontational reaction to the discourse of race and racial beliefs. When resisting race, people often challenged stereotypes or commonly conceived beliefs about racial groups by mobilizing contradictory examples. For example, in a previously described event, Blannie Bowen followed up his reversals, which asked audience members to imagine whites as minorities, by naming instances in which he had seen diversity work effectively. Following a discussion of his successfully integrated church, he described how all of the students in the college of agriculture at Penn State like country music, "even the two African Americans." Rene's fieldnotes record that he asked those students, "'Hey, why do you like country music? Are you guys still brothers?' One of them

responded that a country singer lives near them and allows their family to use his land so they learned to like it.” Bowen’s example, which resists the common assumption that African Americans do not like country music, suggests that race in isolation does not determine tastes, and reminds us that racial groups do not own specific cultural forms or products. At the same time, we note—in an aside we lack the room to develop—that this story of black affinity for a “white” musical form was tied to property relations, and that Bowen did not address this linkage.

This instance of resisting race had a powerful impact because it reproduced the lived experience of the speaker, rather than posing theoretical or hypothetical questions about race. It was Bowen, after all, who questioned whether or not the “guys” were “still brothers” when he found out that they liked country music. By exposing his own racial assumptions about musical taste, he seemed to be demonstrating both the persistence of stereotypes and the ease with which they can be unraveled. Certainly, the two “brothers” remain African American even as or if they like country music. Bowen followed up this example by telling his audience to “change and expand your horizons.” People must resist racial assumptions, he seemed to argue, by extending their field of vision.

Reacting to the power of this kind of overt resistance, Rene wrote in her fieldnotes about her own experience as “the only white person in the room.” Her notes echo Bowen’s emphasis on the need to actively change our perceptions: “I have experienced being the only white person in the room,” she wrote, “because I make the effort and put myself out there. Others are afraid or don’t want to jar their perceptions.” The deliberate attempt to resist race by challenging common perceptions was a crucial element of what Bowen asked his audience to do, and Rene concluded that this effort was one of the keys to racial understanding. To this end, Bowen suggested the possibility of a cultural training program, similar to a study abroad program, but located instead in communities like Chicago’s South Side or East St. Louis, where people would have the opportunity to confront and resist race-based assumptions. In her fieldnotes, Rene applied Bowen’s charge to a local problem as she wondered if universities could create those spaces on campus through specific attention to cultural issues during their orientation sessions for new students. “Perhaps,” she speculated, “there should be programs during orientation that deal more with interacting, learning about, and truly experiencing ‘active integration’ on this campus while people have the chance if they are willing to step out of their comfort zones.”

Racial assumptions about culture drove other examples of people resisting race. Melba Beals, one of the Little Rock Nine and author of *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock Central High School*, came to the U of I in March to give a public lecture in the ballroom of the student union, one of the largest venues on campus. Rene, who attended the event, observed that this was one of the more prominent and well attended *Brown* Commemoration events of the year: “The room was packed with people from the community, professors and students alike. I noticed many Asians, Latinos, and African Americans. I recognized many people from previous *Brown* events.” During the question and answer session, she recorded that a middle-aged white woman asked Beals, “How can I motivate students who do not want to learn? They waste their talent memorizing rap songs.” Beals answered that she should “meet them where they are at, make rap songs out of the lesson.” We find this moment telling: while the audience member explicitly linked rap music to wasted talent and a lack of desire for



learning, and assumed that Beals and the rest of the audience would agree that African Americans who listen to rap music could only be wasting their time, Beals' forceful response challenged the questioner's racial grammar by converting the stereotype into an asset. Echoing a central tenet in the work of John Dewey, the famous philosopher of education, Beals instead pointed to the need to "meet people where they are at"—which means, in this context, working within the familiar constructs of student knowledge as a first step. Her response also suggests that negative assumptions about rap music keep it from becoming a productive educational tool. As she resisted assumptions about rap music, a musical genre widely associated with African Americans (even though white adolescents constitute a large portion of the genre's fans), she also resisted assumptions about race. She effectively used this strategy to challenge stereotypes about African American culture, but resisting race was not her only strategy. In the next section, we discuss how Beals and others sometimes did something similar to—yet ultimately different from—resisting race, by taking race entirely out of the picture.

#### **3.1.4 Emptying Race**

Perhaps the greatest challenge to any discussion of race is the one that asks whether "race" is in the room at all—or whether other factors (e.g., gender, class, etc.) might better explain the matter at hand. With "emptying," we call attention to precisely those moments when people "emptied" a situation of race and its workings. Against the landscape of a year devoted to consideration of race in our place and time, challenges to the pertinence of race could hardly go unnoticed. We attend to these moments because we think they reveal an often unspoken and uncomfortable question: Did "race" produce a particular effect or formation we observed on campus? We mark this question as "unspoken" and "uncomfortable" because conversations about race inevitably ground to a halt whenever it was raised.

We turn now to telling moments at the heart of the *Brown* Commemoration: the campus visits of the Brown sisters and Melba Beals. Unquestionable is the Brown sisters' symbolic importance to the observance of the *Brown* decision's 50th anniversary. Their story, like Beals', is at once a private experience and a part of the nation's public history. In this context, seemingly lighthearted jabs at the relevance of race were provocative. In what follows, we by no means suggest that any of these women denied race. It speaks for itself that the *Brown* sisters and Beals traveled the country throughout the jubilee year—and for years before—in the name of a court decision that sought racial justice. But we are intrigued that occasionally they made comments that effectively emptied race from the conversation. Cheryl Brown Henderson did this when she explained why the decision bears her father's surname, Brown. She explained that Oliver Brown's name led the list because he was the only man among the plaintiffs; she further diminished her father's role by disclosing that he had not been a civil rights activist, and instead merely consented to the NAACP's request that he participate in the lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education. Then Henderson jibed, "Today we would call it sexism," and the crowd erupted in laughter. She went on, "Apparently in that time men were all that and a bag of chips," and the laughter continued.

Remarks from Melba Beals combined the lighthearted emptying accomplished by Cheryl Brown Henderson with a reminder that, in her view, the *Brown* decision was not about race or racial integration, but rather about "access to opportunity." As she put it, "The word integration needs to be tossed out of the window and replaced with access to

opportunity.” She went on with revealing elaborations equating “integration” with “hate”: “I don’t hate anybody. I was adopted by a white family who did a lot for me.” Almost at once, however, she asserted the efficacy of the *Brown* decision and explicitly returned race to the table: “My mother was a maid in a white lady’s kitchen and made one dollar a day. *Brown* was the key to my escape.” She then continued with a defensive comment that spoke to the most prevalent critique of the efficacy of the *Brown* decision. After recognizing unchanged racial circumstances—in the U.S. broadly, and in education particularly—she remarked, “For all those that whine about *Brown*, it worked well for me.” With this comment she seemed to step back from social circumstances emergent after *Brown* so as to imagine only its consequences for individuals: the decision “worked well for me.” Even in brief commentaries like this one, race can be emptied from the conversation and replaced with personalized constructs that do not reference a social context. While personalizing racially influenced interactions offers uncommonly intimate moments to an audience during an academic talk, we are forced to wonder whether such intimacy forfeits connection of deeply personal experience to racism’s deep-seated structure.

As we return to an event described above, during which Blannie Bowen assessed the prerequisites for making agricultural colleges more racially diverse, we find that emptying often enables speakers to generalize racial issues to the broader society. The premise of his talk and of the discussion that followed was that colleges of agriculture typically lag behind other colleges, and thus require special attention. Among the explanations offered for this exceptional status was one that rang loudly in our ethnographers’ ears: the centrality of slavery to any plausible history of American agriculture. With Bowen’s mention of slavery still echoing in the ACES lecture hall, the conversation turned to the cultural and academic environment that even today causes African Americans to keep their distance from the agricultural studies that arguably remain central to any land grant university’s public mission. It was at this point that a white faculty member asked, “What can we do about the chilly climate? There are 40,000 people here. People don’t wave to everyone. What can we do?” This remark effectively emptied race from the conversation about campus climate, attributing the chill to the vast size of the institution. Without missing a beat, Bowen began his reply with a humorous reference to his own Southern upbringing: “I realize that it is a different environment than North Carolina, where people actually speak to each other.” In effect, he was saying, “I know you Midwesterners are generally cold and unfriendly, but that’s no excuse”—a suitable point of departure for restoring race to the conversation. Indeed, he implored his audience to “take the initiative to speak to others” as a first, modest step toward thawing race relations. To underscore the importance of friendly greetings, he then returned race directly to the discussion—as described above—by presenting the scenario of racial reversal in which white audience members became the campus minority.

There was another quite distinctive and, perhaps ironically, racially powerful way in which some African American speakers emptied *Brown* itself of race: by reminding listeners that for African Americans, *Brown* meant equal opportunity rather than racial integration. As Juan Williams, National Public Radio Senior Correspondent, put it, “It was never about sitting next to whites in a classroom; it was about access to resources and a quality of education.” Such a claim may seem, at first encounter, to echo Beals’ statement that “it worked well for me,” but Williams was neither promoting individual

experience over structural conditions nor sacrificing attention to the structure of racism. Instead, he was suggesting that within that structure the prize on which African Americans had fixed their sight was access and opportunity rather than integration itself—which served only as a means to the larger goal.

All of the examples cited above are complex: emptying race from a conversation almost always entails some of the other rhetorical strategies named earlier in this chapter. Because this complexity can amplify its impact, emptying race is the most risky, and potentially the most pernicious, rhetorical challenge to the grammar of race. As an example, we close this section with one speaker's attempt to make this very point. In January, Christopher Edley Jr., founding co-director of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, spoke on affirmative action. While laying the groundwork for his argument, he told a story that characterized the vast divide between whites' and blacks' perceptions of social reality: "In Goose Creek, South Carolina, there was a police raid early before school in a good regional high school that is one-third African American. The surveillance cameras show guns pointed at African American students. It was timed after the black buses arrived and before the whites came. This is an outrage. No drugs or contraband were found. They should be sent to Baghdad. [The crowd laughs.] In general, the white community thought that it was justified. . . . Blacks recognized it as racial profiling. Whites reply: racial paranoia. Blacks: You just don't get it." Edley's dramatic and extreme story is ambiguous, and remains somewhat opaque. Was he claiming that the Goose Creek police should be sent to Iraq so that they could join troops already engaged in racially targeted violence? Or was he thinking that the police would fit right in with troops similarly unable to locate critical contraband? In any event, it was from this extreme position that Edley introduced the notion that Goose Creek's white residents were in denial about the raid's racial motivation, so much so that, for suggesting otherwise, they eagerly charged their black neighbors with "racial paranoia." By concluding his account with black residents' reply that whites "just don't get it," Edley invited his audience to contemplate how the grammar of race can be deployed to put racial reconciliation far out of reach.

As this section has shown, we discerned, in the course of the year's events, four strategies—reversing, ridiculing, resisting, and emptying—that effectively disrupted perceived beliefs about race relations. These responses to a pervasive racial grammar have the capacity both to upset and to reinforce expected beliefs about race relations—and to provide occasions for pointed commentary on the shifts in attitude that must occur if dialogues on race are to produce positive social change. Nicole nicely documented the potential for such commentary in her fieldnotes on a rehearsal for the dance performance choreographed by Dianne McIntyre. Nicole described dancers as they came together in a circle to say, derisively, "It's a multicultural party line." Reflecting on the moment, Nicole wrote, "I believe the dancers are mocking the way in which diversity was 'marketed' to them, particularly within their high schools. Specifically, I'm reminded of various Ethnography of the University class discussions on the difference between diversity existing within a group and a group actually experiencing that diversity through meaningful interactions with people from diverse backgrounds." By incorporating a chorus of the "multicultural party line" into their routine, the dancers advanced the argument that the customary singular solution of multiculturalism cannot solve the complex issues surrounding diversity. They challenged a common assumption with one

five-word sentence uttered in a “mocking tone”; in some ways, their message was more powerful than the volumes of text that attempt to say the same thing. At the same time, their insertion of language into a physical performance highlights the fact that the four strategies we have discussed all rely on verbal play with concepts of race. In the next section, we explore a strategy that relied not on rhetorical interventions, but on challenges to definitions of the university as the alma mater and home of its members.

### 3.2 Bringing It Home

Throughout the *Brown* Commemoration year, speakers and audiences at numerous events sought to “bring it home” by locating issues of diversity and race in or at the university, in the cities of Champaign and Urbana, in Chicago and the Chicago suburbs from which many undergraduates hail, or within the state of Illinois. When this happened, bringing it home almost always constituted a disruptive act; it countered conventional university discourse insofar as it violated the expectation that discourse at the university is properly objective, rational, and distanced from its subject. While we recognize a growing desire to connect university research and teaching to life in the “real world” inside and outside campus boundaries, we also observe that this connection remains far from the norm. As community activist Imani Bazzell astutely observed in her interview with Teresa: “The academy sort of serves the academy. . . . 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.” When participants in the commemoration grounded abstract racial issues in concrete local experience, they pushed others to confront the issues at hand. The move to bring things home often aimed to generate a sense of ownership, to say in effect, “These are your issues, this is your reality.” In so doing, *Brown* Commemoration presenters charged audiences to grapple with problems of race in their own everyday lives. We note that bringing things home often produced a double effect: it gave people “at home” (students, faculty, staff, and Champaign-Urbana community members) a measure of legitimacy, but it also assigned them responsibility as racial actors and producers of racial ideologies. In this section, we ask how various attempts to bring racial issues home worked, what they achieved, and what they can tell us about how the university understands itself.

In a literal sense, home is where we live most intimately; it can be the place where we close off the wider world to enjoy a locus of control not ours once we step out the front door; it can be a place of safety and comfort, and of relative privacy; it can inspire loyalty, strong while we are close by and stronger still as time and distance intervene. But home can also be a place of confinement and isolation: it can be unsafe, a space where the cherished (and legal) expectation of privacy is violated. “Home” is a remarkably elastic word: it maps onto the many places and spaces to which we feel—or are encouraged to feel, or would like to feel—safe and comfortable and attached. The “university,” almost equally elastic in its connotations, thus has a peculiar relationship to home. It wants to be a home-like place toward which individuals express loyalty, but its academic function rejects the cultivation of safety and comfort, for these are thought to be inimical to the agonistic striving that makes for intellectual excellence. Business as usual in the university thus gives no quarter to the emotional intimacy we prize in our “real” homes, and emotional discourse often causes trouble when it emerges onstage

during university activities. And not just because such discourse imperils, or is believed to imperil, rational thought: it is also the case that reminiscing and testimony, the emotional staples of home life, threaten to expose inconvenient, unpleasant truths about the institution. Consequently, whenever *Brown* Commemoration events or speakers or audience members successfully framed the university as home, it became possible to exploit the porous conceptual boundary between these two terms, usually with the effect of mounting a powerful critique of business as usual.

In what follows, we take up exemplary cases of “bringing it home.” “A Homecoming for Affirmative Action” explores the qualities of successful moves to make the *Brown* Commemoration local. The focal point of this subsection is the Project 500 Anniversary, which was received with uncommon enthusiasm, perhaps because it celebrated an initiative unique to this campus. In “Too Close to Home,” we consider the special challenges posed when presenters aimed to bring home issues about which the audience had deeply held, perhaps ossified, preconceptions. Finally, in “Get Out of My House!” we examine Professor Lani Guinier’s keynote address at the May 2004 campus commencement. In Guinier’s address, as at many other *Brown* events, home was mapped onto the campus, the community, the state, and even the nation. Sometimes this mapping evoked sentimental attachment to a place or, more precisely, a moment in time in a place. But more often, as in Guinier’s address, the effect was to remind us that the sentimental entailments of homeplace metaphors paper over the reality of residential segregation and state-sanctioned poverty. Guinier, like other *Brown* speakers, used this critique of home to document people’s resilience in the face of symbolic and real racial violence.

### **3.2.1 A Homecoming for Affirmative Action**

One of the *Brown* Commemoration’s first programs was also one of its most elaborate: a week-long program marking the 35th anniversary of Project 500, an initiative undertaken by the university in 1968 to enroll 500 African American and Latino students in the first-year class. Since the anniversary functioned, in part, as an officially sanctioned homecoming for the students originally admitted to the University of Illinois under the rubric of Project 500, it gave members of the campus and Champaign-Urbana communities an opportunity to reflect on their own histories and to take stock of matters of race—especially the status of affirmative action—at the University of Illinois in 2003. The Project 500 Anniversary was not, strictly speaking, a *Brown* Commemoration event. Planning for it developed, at least initially, apart from planning for the commemoration. Even so, by virtue of its success in “bringing it home,” we imagined that the anniversary celebration would model how other *Brown* Commemoration projects could “bring it home,” too. That did not turn out to be the case: the Project 500 Anniversary was seldom referenced during later events, and its inclusiveness—students, alumni, and members of the Champaign-Urbana community participated together—was, in retrospect, quite unusual. We will highlight and discuss this difference before turning to difficult questions raised by this unique commemoration of a campus event.

Many staff and students pointed to student participation in the Project 500 Anniversary program as both critical to its success and indicative of its departure from university business as usual. A student came up with the idea of marking the 35th anniversary, and students organized most of the week’s events. One event, in particular, was designed to put current students into the shoes of their predecessors. On Thursday, October 16, more than 500 students gathered outside the Illinois Street Residence Hall

(ISR), donned black commemorative T-shirts, and walked en masse several blocks across campus to the Quad; they were commemorating the day in 1968 when Project 500 students, who were being evicted from ISR, gathered with their supporters in the Student Union to stage an ad hoc protest for better living conditions on campus. When student leader Nneka Dudley, the chair of the committee on education for the campus chapter of the NAACP, was interviewed by Teresa, she described the special capacity of students to reach out and “bring it home” for their peers: “Students called upon each other to participate and the result was an astounding success. The goal for ‘The Walk’ was five hundred students. . . . Seven hundred attended. They ran out of shirts.” Teresa wrote, after interviewing Nneka, “As everyone was waiting for things to get started, students were on their cell phones calling their friends telling them that they NEEDED to get down to ISR and participate in the commemoration. . . . Thinking about the success and support of the student body gives me shivers as I sit here.”

Nneka used starkly different terms to describe other *Brown* Commemoration events, most of which followed the model of traditional university forums. Noting that the *Brown* Commemoration planning committee did not have a student subcommittee, she recalled that “a lot of the programs, from what I understand that they had, weren’t necessarily student-friendly. Meaning that they were dry or just like the whole ‘let’s sit down in a lecture and be lectured to at four o’clock over at Levis Faculty Center.’ It’s something that the students are not going to really want to be interested in. . . . I just really think they could have done a better job of reaching the student population in general, and not just trying to reach into the African American student population. It’s like the faculty in and of itself kind of commemorating *Brown*.” We see in this critique two points. First, it calls attention to the fact that questions of race and diversity should be pertinent and important to all students—not just to African American students or students of color. Second, Nneka’s comments challenged the adequacy of lectures, symposia, and seminars, upon which faculty members typically depend for scholarly dialogue, as venues for meaningfully engaging students. In these settings, where undergraduate students are typically marginalized, if not entirely ignored, by presentations assuming a specialist’s level of knowledge, faculty members dominate discussion and set a forbiddingly high standard for the right to talk. As a consequence, few students dare to join in follow-up questions and comments from the audience, and most are reduced to passive consumers. Project 500, on the other hand, fully engaged students as creators, organizers, and audience.

In part, we can attribute this level of engagement to that fact that the original Project 500 initiative, unlike the *Brown* decision, was a local event uniquely meaningful to the University of Illinois and its surrounding communities. This fact clearly galvanized alumni reaction to the Project 500 Anniversary, and no doubt contributed to its success in bringing the issues home. Much of the effort to mobilize participation from students, alumni, and the local community was organized through the African American Cultural Program, whose director, Nathaniel Banks, grew up in Champaign-Urbana and was one of the original Project 500 initiative students. Reflecting on the relation of the Project 500 Anniversary to the *Brown* Commemoration, Banks noted, “In the black community we didn’t really see *Brown* as a major force because it took so long for it to take hold. In Champaign, it took between 1954 and 1964 for there even to be talk about desegregation of schools. . . . But because I was a Project 500 student, I saw Project 500 as a defining

point in my life.” Teresa’s fieldnotes suggest that many Project 500 alumni were eager to talk with this generation of U of I students, and reveled in the opportunity to share stories of their struggles and experiences during college, to describe what their college experiences have meant for their lives after graduation, and to impress on current students the responsibility they have to continue the fight for racial justice.

The relationships between alumni and current students created by the Project 500 Anniversary not only excited the alumni and set the program apart from other *Brown* events, but also appeared to account for its remarkably powerful impact on students. The emotion and sense of intimacy generated in these relationships fostered current students’ dawning appreciation of their personal and direct connection to local living history. As Teresa remarked in the notes from her interview with Nneka Dudley, “Like . . . many others, Nneka liked those programs in which you ‘were sitting there with living history.’ It’s amazing to be able to talk to someone who can say, ‘These were the times, this was the social climate, I was there.’ The visits by the Freedom Riders, *Brown* Sisters, and the original Project 500 participants seem to be the programs that have the biggest impact on people. A chance for interaction with people who actually lived through times is invaluable.” But the Project 500 Anniversary had significance for current students beyond that of hearing historical figures like the Freedom Riders and *Brown* sisters speak. Students not only learned what it was like to be a student of color brought to the University of Illinois in 1968 by Project 500, but also saw, quite clearly and directly, how their own experience in 2003 connected to that historical moment. In part because they shared a sense of identity and home with the Project 500 alumni, they could see themselves as part of that still-evolving history.

It was with this developing understanding that students listened to speeches delivered on the Quad following the commemorative walk. One speech, which Rene and Teresa found especially moving, brought to light a theme raised by many *Brown* events: the tension between progress made toward racial justice since *Brown v. Board* and the considerable work that remains to be done if the full promise of *Brown* is to be realized. Anton Downing, a history major who helped organize the week’s program, told the crowd that the Project 500 Initiative had, in one year, tripled the enrollment of African American students at the university: “Think about if our population tripled again. How great would that be?” Downing also acknowledged that students of color arriving at U OF I in the 21st century face conditions far different from those confronting the students who began integrating the campus. When African Americans were first admitted to the university, they were not allowed to live in university dormitories; instead, they lived with African American families in the community, much like foreign exchange students might do. This description of the original Project 500 participants’ conditions elicited the strongest response from Rene and Teresa: they were most struck by the fact that, despite this segregationist legacy, Downing could argue that Project 500 instantly made the University of Illinois a “pillar” of affirmative action. Teresa could not accept this claim. Referring to continuing racial divisions and tensions on campus, she later remarked, “If the U of I was or is a pillar, we’re in a lot of trouble.” Downing did acknowledge that 35 years later, even as then Chancellor Nancy Cantor’s presence on the Urbana campus advanced a number of program initiatives and signaled a renewed commitment to affirmative action, much remains to be done. That work, he suggested, involves constantly holding the university to its commitment: since the budgets for such resources

as the Office of Minority Student Affairs and the African American Cultural Program are reviewed annually, students must stand ready each year to remind campus administrators of how much these entities are valued. To fully appreciate this complicated historical moment, Teresa and Rene had to reconcile their impulse to celebrate the progress represented by Project 500 with the ugly realities that gave rise to the need for affirmative action and persist in making it necessary today. Downing and those who spoke with him used the occasion of a homecoming to dramatize both what it once took to bring diversity to the U of I, and what it will now take to maintain and grow that diversity. It was not enough, he implied, for students of color to merely attend the University and assimilate to its ways. They must inhabit it, claim it as their home away from home, and with regularity demand the services that make it habitable without sacrificing racial or ethnic identity. To do so will require, among other things, that they grapple with the complexities of race relations among students on campus.

As students of color work to make the U of I a safe and comfortable home, as they work to overcome exclusion from campus settings and spaces that have historically been white, they face the ways in which differences among them as African, Latino/a, Native, and Asian Americans condition their relations with whites and with one another. Confusion around ownership of and participation in the Project 500 Anniversary illustrates this point. While all *Brown* Commemoration programs were open to the public, it was not clear to a number of students whether that was the case for the Project 500 Anniversary, particularly for the re-enactment of “The Walk.” Rene, who participated in the re-enactment, noted that “there were only a few students not of African American or Latino descent” at the march, and she acknowledged that as a white person she “felt a little awkward, not being black. . . . Like Teresa, I wish that the event had been publicized more. If it weren’t for my roommate, I might not have gone. Even if I had heard about it, but none of my African American friends were going, I don’t think I would be brave enough to go alone.” Clearly, students inclined to show solidarity across racial lines struggled with how to do so in this complex racial context. They worried about authenticity: if the original Project 500 students were predominantly African American, must the re-enactors in 2003 identify so as well? The question raised by Nneka about the Commemoration’s “job of reaching the student population in general, and not just trying to reach into the African American student population” resurfaces here, but in a different form. Students’ attempts to determine authenticity, ownership, and stake in the Project 500 Anniversary reflect broader unresolved questions about who decides how the university will move forward to meet the needs of, and become a true home to, an increasingly diverse student body.

### **3.2.2 Too Close to Home**

Some efforts to bring matters of race home risked failing because they engaged topics that people are unwilling, unable, or unprepared to broach in productive ways. Such topics are typically viewed as off limits, and when raised are treated in a perfunctory manner. Often these topics simply touch too close to home—that is, they are too sensitive, personal, or revealing to be engaged honestly and openly in a public venue. Paul’s observations suggested that such was the case with discussions of Chief Illiniwek, then the U of I’s athletic symbol, during *Brown* Commemoration events. It is not unusual for discussions of race on the U of I campus to turn to the subject of Chief Illiniwek. It might have been all but impossible to prevent this from happening in a session billed as



“interactive” and titled “Images of Native Americans: Textbooks, Movies, and Mascots.” Perhaps because she understood this situation, Lakota Harden—a renowned orator, activist, community organizer, dancer, poet, and daughter of seven generations of devoted Lakota leaders—announced at the beginning of the session that, in Paul’s words, “She didn’t want to have a discussion focused on Chief Illiniwek. She said that instead of focusing the discussion on the stated topic, she . . . would have the Native people in the audience . . . talk about what their concerns were.” This event was held on the final evening of Harden’s three-day visit to the U of I, where, as a guest-in-residence at Unit One/Allen Hall, she lectured, led workshops, shared meals, and otherwise engaged in the intellectual and social life of this undergraduate living and learning community. By this point in her visit, she had no doubt heard a great deal about the contested views of the Chief on campus.

It seems likely that Harden sidestepped the Chief in this session because she understood that the Chief dialogue was so gridlocked, as opponents spoke past rather than to each other, that no attempt to “bring it home” to the Chief would be productive. Indeed, if there was one thing about which foes and supporters of the Chief could agree, it was the absence of a compromise position both sides could accept. In a written report to the U of I Board of Trustees in 2002, Trustee Roger Plummer had reached this conclusion after interviews with members of both camps, and reported that no compromise was possible. The ubiquitous nature of the Chief symbol and controversy at the U of I—always the elephant in the room—profoundly constrains meaningful dialogue on race on campus. In contrast to most of the other attempts made to bring it home, Harden’s decision illustrates that sometimes the furnishings of home are too familiar and too threadbare to stimulate new ways of looking at a problem. While we observe that it is typically productive to bring things home, we also note that when, in the name of bringing it home, people insist on the authenticity of their—and only their—position, genuine dialogue does not follow. Although she chose not to focus discussion on the Chief, Harden did “bring it home” in another way: she cleared a rhetorical space in which Native American students could testify to what it is like to be at the U of I on a daily basis, and other students could hear, digest, and perhaps begin to comprehend their testimony. What Native students had to say when given this opportunity exposed one of the challenges of bringing it home: the cultural tax or burden that people of color often shoulder in discussions of race that take place in settings dominated by whites. Paul described the first person to speak at the Harden event this way: “A Native student . . . said that she is tired of everyone thinking her identity is only in relation to the ‘Chief.’ She said that when someone meets her, the first thing they ask is not where she is from or about her schooling but instead her opinion on the ‘Chief’ . . . . Anytime in one of her classes (from grade school on to the college level) Native Americans are discussed . . . she can see people turn and look at her to ‘see what the Indian says.’ “ Rene, who recognized this dynamic when reading Paul’s notes, added that it is a “similar situation to everyone looking at the African American in the class when talking about slavery or affirmative action.” Paul elaborated: “She said she does not even feel comfortable in the Native American class (it has close to 100 students, most of whom are white) since she is the only Native in the discussion section she was taking and they seem to do the same thing. . . . She said she came to the U of I to do nothing but get an education, but instead she was forced to get involved in being an activist because she could not deal with seeing

the ‘Chief’ logo everywhere without trying to do something about it. She said that she does not feel safe at the U of I and . . . that she is unable to ever just be a student because of the ‘Chief.’ She said that even though she is proud of her Native heritage she would like to have people look and relate to her as a person and not as the ‘Indian.’” Harden’s decision to sidestep the Chief issue may best be viewed as a successful effort to avoid calling on Native Americans to take a stand on or speak to the issue of the Chief. It is as if the Chief has made “home” uninhabitable. Thus, Harden brought it home by fostering an examination of images of Native Americans without recreating the Chief Illiniwek debate so many at U of I have learned to tune out. One can only conjecture how far this type of session and others like it might go to cultivate racial understanding. Paul observed that another Native student who participated in the session “said that she wonders why the pro-chiefers could not see past their own interests and see that the ‘Chief’ was hurting people. . . . She wondered why people would even consider ‘tradition’ to be more important than people.” Harden tried hard to foreground people over tradition, real lives over sentimental identification with symbols.

### **3.2.3 Get Out of My House!**

Throughout the year, successful moves to bring it home led audiences to contemplate *Brown*’s influence on race relations, and, more generally, to take stock of contemporary understandings of race in America. The most provocative of these moves, a challenge to fundamental assumptions about the nature of home and home life, came during the culminating event of the *Brown* year—the university’s 133rd commencement—in the form of Professor Lani Guinier’s commencement address. Guinier, the first black woman to be appointed a tenured professor of law at Harvard University, argued that the University of Illinois family should include poor and minority students who have been—and to a substantial degree continue to be—excluded from admission. In so doing, she prompted consideration of the question, “For whom is this university home?” In the days following commencement, some who attended, and even some who did not, made the answer clear. In letters to administrators and calls to a local radio station, they answered, in tones of anger and hurt, with a refrain that we distill as “Not you! Get out of my house!” Here, we explore Guinier’s address and audience reaction to it.

The university commencement was, for the most part, a joyous occasion on which thousands of students, families, and friends gathered in Assembly Hall to celebrate the conferral of degrees and contemplate the graduates’ passage into a new phase of life. In his introductory remarks, President James Stukel touched on several themes commonplace in commencement rhetoric. After calling graduation one of “life’s singular accomplishments,” he reminded graduates that in their moment of achievement, they in fact “stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us,” specifically “the generations of men and women who have added to the glory of making this such a wonderful and great university.” These men and women, according to Stukel, form the “Illinois family,” a “fellowship” of alumni dedicated to maintaining the institution’s status as a “great public university.” Stukel entreated the graduates to take this “kinship” seriously, “to keep that bond strong.” Only by maintaining this bond, he suggested, would graduates meet their “responsibility to extend the same wonderful possibility to those that follow you, just as those who preceded you have done on your behalf.” What was their reward for acting responsibly? Stukel concluded his remarks with this promise:

“Wherever you go, know that you are and always will be welcome here as you come back to campus.”

A short time later, the combined campus choruses—the Varsity Men’s Glee Club, the Women’s Glee Club, and the Black Chorus—joined for “Illinois,” the state song. The lyrics of the first stanza speak sentimentally of “rivers gently flowing” and “prairies verdant growing,” a placid downstate idyll offering graduates a respite from the promised rigors of life beyond school. Yet even the state song reminds listeners that a dear price was paid so that “mellow tones” might “echo on the breeze / rustling through the leafy trees” of the graduates’ home state. The song’s final stanza recalls the “wondrous story” of Illinoisans’ heroism and sacrifice in the nation’s war to end slavery.

With the themes of mutuality, responsibility, and sacrifice still echoing through the Hall, Professor Lani Guinier rose to deliver the invited commencement address. She began by gesturing to the day’s honorary degree recipients, five of whom were African American, noting that she was proud to “stand on the shoulders of giants like these in speaking to you, as requested, about the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.” In her address, Guinier examined the legacy of *Brown*, judging it an important statement of Constitutional principle. “In the minds of most legal scholars,” she noted, “that decision is a Constitutional icon.” She agreed with Ted Shaw, the Director Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, who has argued that by declaring segregation unconstitutional, the court in *Brown* “breathed life, finally, into the Constitution for African Americans.” Guinier attributed the progress made in the 50 years following *Brown* to the “combination of a legal declaration of principle and the fearlessness of those civil rights activists, who rewrote the law with their marching feet.” Despite this success, Guinier argued *Brown* was a failure “when measured by current reality.” Describing this reality, and in so doing “bringing it home,” she observed that “right here in the state of Illinois, we see that this state is the second most segregated state in the country for Blacks attending public school. This state is the fifth most segregated in the country for Latinos attending public school. Forty-eight percent of black students graduate from high school. Fifty-eight percent of Latinos graduate from high school. Eighty-three percent of white students graduate from high school.” Later, considering the implications of *Brown*’s failure in the arena of higher education, she cited a study of “146 of the most selective colleges and universities in the country, including the University of Illinois,” which found “that a disproportionate number of students going to public institutions of higher education come from the most affluent portions of our society.” Seventy-four percent of students at these institutions come from the top twenty-five percent of the population as measured by socioeconomic status indicators while only three percent come from the bottom twenty-five percent of the population, and only ten percent come from the bottom half of the population. Paraphrasing the study’s author, she concluded that “higher education has become a gift from the poor to the rich. The poor people are paying taxes and the rich people are getting an education.” This line drew loud applause during the morning ceremony, attended primarily by students in the liberal arts and sciences, but no applause at all during the afternoon ceremony for engineering, agriculture, fine arts, and education students. Guinier’s suggestion that the failure to make good on the promise of *Brown* could be “turned inside out to become success” resonated with one audience, but not with the other.

Having located issues of inequality within the confines of the state, and at the state's flagship university, Guinier turned to ways in which the social fractures left in the wake of *Brown* might be healed by the graduates, whom she figured as leaders of their generation capable of driving social reform. She implored the graduates to join forces across race and class lines, and to accept responsibility for such reform. To this end, she invoked the metaphor of the coal miners' canary. To protect themselves from lethal odorless gases, coal miners once carried canaries into the mines, relying on the birds' delicate physiology as an early warning system. When the birds' health began to fail, the miners would exit ahead of disaster. Guinier urged the commencement day assembly to think of America's poor and minorities as society's canaries, whose struggles ought to alert broader society to imminent threat. She argued, "This to me is the challenge for you as the leaders of tomorrow. . . . [Light applause]. We have to become canary watchers. We have to learn from our mistakes that we cannot pathologize the canary, because if we fail to heed the lesson of the canary, we will all be suffocating in a toxic mine. . . . We need to begin to see the relationship between success and community . . . to appreciate those who link their fate, who work to ensure that the community will invest in all of us so that we can all succeed—so that we can all appreciate the benefits of a great public education such as the education that you have received here at the University of Illinois."

A traditional function of commencement is to instill in graduates the idea that the university has been and will continue to be their home. Having sheltered, protected, and nurtured them, the alma mater hopes and expects that its graduates will continue to express their attachment to home with generous (financial) support. On one level, Guinier deployed the most conventional of graduation-day tropes. Like President Stukel, she paid tribute to those on whose "shoulders" she now stands; like Stukel, she entreated the graduates to recognize their responsibility to future generations; like Stukel, she did this by linking her words to local circumstance. Guinier, however, challenged convention to the point of destroying it. By calling attention to those who have not been and still are not "at home" at the university, Guinier unsettled the comfort of home for some graduates and their families and friends. Moreover, the near naming of white privilege adds entirely new hues to Stukel's ordinary invocation of the "privilege" attained by university graduates. What Guinier exposed, of course, is that privilege comes at a price, since haves imply have-nots, and in this case not just any have-nots. She underscored that ethnic minority families pay taxes like all other families to underwrite university operations, yet their children are demonstrably under-represented in the University of Illinois student body. What is novel about this assertion is not its injection of racial politics into what was expected to be a race-neutral proceeding. After all, race was signified in many ways throughout the ceremony: by the multicolored Kente sashes worn by students affiliated with the African American Cultural Program, by the choice of honorary degree recipients, by the voices of the Black Chorus, and even in the state song's allusion to the Civil War. Nor was there anything especially novel about asking graduates to examine their own circumstances. The same holds for urging graduates to act in causes for social justice. What was novel, however—and what elicited negative response in the weeks following the ceremony—is the way Guinier yoked together race, privilege, and obligation. She asserted that the shoulders one is privileged to stand upon at graduation represent not just one's academic forebears, as President Stukel had said, but others as well, including those who have historically been denied access to the

institution. Consequently, one's debt is not only to past generations of students admitted to the university, but also to those who continue to be excluded. She extended the metaphor of family to include those who are absent from the table, but prepared or served its viands. Once these absent family members are remembered, graduates' obligations extend to joining others in combating the injustice of their exclusion, even if that means withdrawing privilege from those who have come to consider a seat at the table an entitlement rather than a gift.

Audience resistance to Guinier's analysis, bitterly expressed in letters and email messages to university administrators, exposed the contours and fault lines that shape discourse on diversity and race at the University of Illinois. For some, the radical departure from the canonical commencement address, particularly Guinier's reflection on the importance of learning from and overcoming failure, was deeply demoralizing. Guinier spoke frankly about some of the most difficult moments in her own life, when she felt defeated and unable to go on, but she also characterized them as opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed in ways she never imagined possible. She recalled civil rights struggles that illustrated the parallel point for communities, namely that diverse communities can learn from and overcome failure. Yet, for many in the commencement audience, a message meant to engage imaginations and lift spirits had a quite opposite effect. One parent wrote: "We were anticipating words of encouragement and celebration. What we received instead was a speech about dead canaries and failure. . . . Our daughter was so discouraged by the continual and redundant use of the 'f' word (failure) that she honestly felt discouraged rather than uplifted. She felt defeated before she even had a chance to begin her life outside the hallowed halls of learning." Another parent simply asked, "Was this inspirational?" Clearly, this segment of the audience identified with neither the community nor the pain of failure Guinier so eloquently invoked. Analysis of Guinier's address on a local talk radio program pointed out that Guinier mentioned the word "failure" 31 times, and "success" only 13 times. Unable or unwilling to hear how success can grow out of failure, some audience members heard only failure itself. Nor did they understand that Guinier was describing for middle-class whites the possibility of solidarity with poor whites and people of color, all of whom, she was claiming, have lost or will soon lose access to elite public universities as state support continues to decline. While Guinier may have failed in bringing home this message, she at least succeeded in provoking discomfort—and thereby thought—in her audience.

If some felt defeated by the call to consider the contemporary challenges of racial injustice in their own lives, others felt attacked by what they viewed as shameless promotion of a political agenda "designed to stir up racial hatred" at the Commencement ceremony. One parent stated, "I felt that we were brought to the University under the guise of a Commencement for our sons and daughters only to find ourselves a captive audience for your agenda-driven speaker." Another suggested, "I do not know this person, but if it was her intention to offend many of the parents in the audience she succeeded." A third offered, "If it was meant to shame me . . . it didn't work. If it was meant to be an incendiary speech it was a huge success." Perhaps feeling betrayed by university administrators who had failed to protect the sanctity of home, some took the short step from questioning Guinier's motives to questioning those of the university officials who had invited her to speak. "We can only hope and pray," one person wrote,

“that Ms. Guinier was speaking on her own behalf and the views she espoused are not the views of the public university to which our many tax dollars flow.” Others did not hesitate to assert that the university endorsed Guinier’s views, as this message states: “I know the University had to know the content of Ms. Guinier’s ‘commencement address’ and can’t find the words to express how upset and disgusted I was during her soap box rant.” If university administrators would not protect the home front, this segment of the audience was prepared to do so themselves.

The first line of defense was to distinguish those who have legitimate claim to call the university “home” from those who do not. Provoked by Guinier’s analysis, some in the University of Illinois family called the ownership of the university into question: “I was appalled and disgusted to hear the venom spewed from her mouth. It was a disgrace that the University of Illinois not only gave her a platform from which she was able to express her views but also gave her an honorary doctorate. No doubt it is people like your speaker who are also trying to get rid of our Chief. These people have absolutely NO interest in our University, NO love for our University with its history and heritage; they simply want to USE our University as a Political Tool. I resent the fact that Ms. Guinier was given that opportunity.” When Guinier’s ideas challenged parents’ and students’ views of university business as usual, particularly their sense of ownership of the university, her status as a disinterested “outsider” was invoked to discredit her. The logic was identical to that used against Chancellor Cantor in the debates about Chief Illiniwek: only those who have no interest or investment in the university, or those who fail to love it—only outsiders—could see the university as Guinier does. Imputing outsider status to Guinier was intended to undermine any authority she might have had to speak to life at the University of Illinois. By implication, those who share Guinier’s views were cast as outsiders, too, not as family members with who, despite their differences, “home” must be shared. Construing ownership this way provides justification for treating as outsiders the very same poor and minority citizens who have systematically been denied admission—those perhaps inclined to share Guinier’s views. Construing ownership this way seeks to silence competing voices, even though the university is a public institution that, arguably, should accommodate diverse views and values.

Letters and emails like these grounded their writers’ ownership of the university not only in claims of loyalty to the university’s history and heritage, but also, to a significant degree, in the paying of taxes and tuition. At the heart of many negative reactions, perhaps especially for white families that struggled financially to put their children through the University of Illinois, was difficulty accepting Guinier’s claim that “higher education has become a gift from the poor to the rich.” Hard work, sacrifice, and dogged pursuit of opportunity figured prominently in the prevailing counter-narrative. As one upset father wrote: “To tell the parents of students who have worked their entire life (sometimes 2 jobs) to put themselves and their children through college that they got there on the backs of the poor . . . please. My son received no financial assistance whatsoever. . . . I am not RICH, nor do I live in the SUBURBS. I am just the middle class backbone of this country. And if I am not mistaken, it is my taxes that support most of the programs that help the less fortunate. . . . I am where I am today and my son graduated Sunday because we worked hard. Therefore, I was deeply offended to hear how I and my son have gotten to where we are, not through our own effort and talents, but via displacement of the poor. The public education system is in place for all the public, not

just the poor public.” Another father echoed, “To say that the taxes of the poor have put my children through school is just wrong. Yes, my wife and I are white, suburban, middle class parents, but we are born of immigrants who came to this country with nothing, and grew up in the inner city. We took advantage of the opportunities that were available to us, which I might add are far less than those being offered today to poor students. For her to generalize and tell us that the taxes of the poor are paying to educate my children shows me that she has not spent a lot of time looking at my tax bill and where those dollars are spent.” Another parent “took extreme exception to Ms. Guinier’s” argument: “Since when do only poor men pay taxes? . . . Our daughter has a ridiculous amount of debt now that she has passed through the public education system. Certainly this gift Ms. Guinier spoke of must have gone to someone other than our daughter. I am aghast that this woman dare suggest that our child and thousands like her have achieved an educational goal only while trodding across the hard-working back of some misrepresented and woe-begone poor man.” For many parents, Guinier’s message may have touched too close to home.

These reactions may betray some confusion about Guinier’s admittedly complex argument, which required the audience to digest likely-unfamiliar statistics, understand how higher education is financed, take a historical view of inequalities in access to higher education, and identify across racial and class lines. Guinier did not argue that graduates’ and their parents’ hard work was not central to their commendable academic accomplishments. Guinier’s attempt to bring it home led some in the audience who felt that their sacrifice was not adequately appreciated to react defensively. Her message appears to have hit home in an uncomfortable way. One often sees, across the state, bumper stickers reading, “My child and my money go to the University of Illinois.” More than a joke, this message names a sensitive issue: when parents have paid for their child’s university education, they expect some recognition of their efforts, perhaps especially on Commencement Day. In this context, some parents could not reconcile what they believed they had rightfully earned with the idea that in higher education the state’s affluent families benefit at the expense of the poor. That they perceived their own taxes to be benefiting the poor appears only to have contributed to the problem.

In bringing her message home to graduates and their families and friends, Guinier asked for more than some in her audience were prepared to give. She asked that they confront the issue of unequal access to public education right here in the state of Illinois. She challenged them to broaden their cherished notions of family, home, and community to make room for historically excluded others. In effect, she asked less affluent whites, those who had to sacrifice the most to see their children graduate, to identify with people of color. In solidarity, she argued, they might stake their claim to the university. But on a day when the less affluent celebrated their ticket up and out of modest circumstances—a college degree—many of them chose to identify with the affluent instead. Rather than expand their notions of community and invite new members in, they demanded that the perceived interlopers get out.

### 3.3 Conclusion

Efforts to bring things home throughout the *Brown* Commemoration year forced event participants and audiences to grapple with the local realities of diversity and race. Whether these efforts illuminated racial dynamics in the university, the cities of Champaign and Urbana, Chicago and its suburbs, or the state of Illinois, bringing it home challenged “business as usual” at the university. In these moments, abstract racial issues came to life in concrete local experience. Objectivity and rationality gave way to subjectivity and emotionality. In the most successful and hopeful of these moments, *Brown* event participants felt themselves to be part of both the history and future of race and diversity in America and the American university. In the most divisive moments, participants sought to deny participation in history and close the ranks of those who could claim title to the university.

Together, “The Grammar of Race” and “Bringing it Home” reveal received practices and discourses on race and diversity at the university. They expose an academic discourse that is largely colorblind and generally comfortable celebrating diversity, a discourse that for the most part does not seriously inspect racism either at the university or in the local community. The successful challenges to university business as usual described in this chapter often made audiences uncomfortable to the point of provoking serious resistance to change. But resistance or no, these efforts set the stage for going beyond the university’s business as usual, opening up possibilities for new and productive dialogue and action, new ways of thinking and doing race and diversity. In the next chapter, we explore some of the ways in which various *Brown* year producers and audiences—students, university administrators, faculty and staff, and members of the local community—envisioned these efforts and experienced their effects.



#### **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.

## 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 Ortégón, 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.UofI.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.



## 6.0 Recommendations

1. Participants in dialogues on race and diversity should "bring it home" by addressing race and diversity as they pertain to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
2. Programming on race and diversity topics should not shy away from intellectual and emotional discomfort as such programming provokes change in how people think.
3. Programming on race and diversity topics should be integrated into the daily routines of campus living, learning, and working if it is expected to produce lasting change. Such integrated programming is often expensive, and so should be made a budget priority as the university plans for its future.
4. To increase the likely efficacy of programs treating the issues of race and diversity, students should be given substantive roles in planning efforts.
5. Many campus units sponsored *Brown* Commemoration events, including some that were relatively new to dialogues on race and diversity. This broad sponsorship should be sustained and not allowed to narrow to just those units directly charged with addressing diversity issues on campus.
6. Dialogues on race and racism should contribute not only to a stronger multiracial campus community, but also to a multiracial society. Toward this end, programming that articulates with concerns of the Champaign-Urbana community should be encouraged.
7. In the February 16, 2007 press release announcing that Chief Illiniwek is no longer to be used as an athletic symbol of the university, Board of Trustees Chair Lawrence Eppley stated, "It will be important now to ensure the accurate recounting and safekeeping of the tradition as an integral part of the history of the University." Our research on the *Brown* Commemoration year suggests many constituencies should be included in planning the accurate recounting of the history of Chief Illiniwek.