



Brown at Fifty

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
COMMEMORATES
*BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION***

**EDITED BY
ORVILLE VERNON BURTON
AND
DAVID O'BRIEN**

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS
Urbana and Chicago**

STOS

Dedicated to

Nancy Cantor and Richard Herman
whose inspiration and support made this volume
and the commemoration it documents possible

And in memory of

Ed Blankenheim
John Hope Franklin
Sekou Sundiata

A generous grant from Agnes Gund
made the color reproduction
of the art possible.

© 2009 by the Board of Trustees
of the University of Illinois
All rights reserved
Manufactured in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 C P 5 4 3 2 1

☺ This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Remembering Brown at fifty : the University of Illinois
commemorates Brown v. Board of Education /
edited by Orville Vernon Burton and David O'Brien.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-252-03477-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 978-0-252-07665-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Discrimination in education—Law and legislation—
United States—History. 2. Segregation in education—
Law and legislation—United States—History.
3. African Americans—Civil rights. 4. Civil rights—
United States. 5. Brown, Oliver, 1918–1961—Trials,
litigation, etc. 6. Topeka (Kan.). Board of Education—
Trials, litigation, etc. I. Burton, Orville Vernon.

II. O'Brien, David, 1962–

KF4155.R45 2009

344.73'0798—dc22 2009026685

gift

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments x

Introduction

Orville Vernon Burton and David O'Brien 1

SECTION I: BROWN: ITS HISTORY AND LEGACY

1. Darlene Clark Hine
The *Briggs v. Elliott* Legacy: Black Culture, Consciousness,
and Community before *Brown*, 1930–1954 23
2. George Lipsitz
Getting Around *Brown*: The Social Warrant
of the New Racism 38
3. Margaret L. Andersen
From *Brown* to *Grutter*: The Diverse Beneficiaries
of *Brown v. Board of Education* 64
4. Laughlin McDonald
Beyond School Desegregation: The Impact of *Brown* 88
5. Jason Chambers
“A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste”: The Advertising Council,
the United Negro College Fund, and Educational Access for
African Americans 105
6. Joe R. Feagin and Bernice McNair Barnett
Success and Failure: How Systemic Racism Trumped the
Brown v. Board of Education Decision 117
7. Lani Guinier
From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: *Brown v. Board of
Education* and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma 149

SECTION II: BROWN AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

8. Joseph A. De Laine Jr.
Briggs: South Carolina's Bold Step That Led to Brown 185
9. Ophelia De Laine Gona
About Integration: In Memory of the Reverend J. A. De Laine 193
10. John Hope Franklin
My Life and Times with Thurgood Marshall 198
11. Constance Curry
The Intolerable Burden 205
12. James C. Onderdonk
The Freedom Riders: Two Personal Perspectives 211
13. Ed Blankenheim
Looking Back at the Freedom Riders 221
14. Kal Alston
The Middle Generation after *Brown* 224

SECTION III: THE ARTS AND BROWN

15. Sekou Sundiata
Why Colored Faces in High Places Just Won't Do 233
16. John Jennings
The Chance Project 244
17. Ralph Lemon
What Was Always There 253
18. Carrie Mae Weems and David O'Brien
Art and Integration: An Interview with Carrie Mae Weems 262
19. David O'Brien
Social Studies: Eight Artists Address *Brown* 269

SECTION IV: ILLINOIS AND BROWN

20. Kathryn H. Anthony and Nicholas Watkins
A Legacy of Firsts: African Americans in Architecture
at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 281

21. Nathaniel C. Banks
Reflections on the *Brown* Commemoration from a
Champaign Native 301
22. Joy Ann Williamson Lott
Reform in the Black Power Era 307
23. Richard Herman
Lest We Forget 318
24. James W. Loewen
Enforcing *Brown* in Sundown Towns 325

SECTION V: PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS AND BROWN AND ITS LEGACY

25. Julian Bond
Civil Rights: Now and Then 339
 26. Freeman A. Hrabowski III
Reflections on America's Academic Achievement Gap:
A Fifty-Year Perspective 358
 27. Christopher Benson
Just Because of the Color of His Skin:
The 1955 Lynching of Emmett Till 373
 28. Juan Williams and Christopher Teal
Thurgood Marshall's Vision 396
- Epilogue
Mary L. Dudziak
Brown's Global Impact 403
- Notes on Contributors 411
- Index 423

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank a number of individuals whose work and support made this volume possible. A generous grant from Agnes Gund made the color reproduction of the artwork possible. Simon Appleford, Beatrice Burton, Nick Gaffney, Victor Martinez, and Mary Beth Zundo were excellent research assistants. At the University of Illinois Press, we wish to thank Joan Catapano, Rebecca McNulty, Jennifer Reichlin, and Sue Breckenridge. A grant from the Center for Democracy in a Multiracial Society allowed David O'Brien to devote his time more fully to the *Brown* commemoration.

Two individuals must receive our deepest gratitude. The idea of devoting a year's worth of programming to the *Brown* decision was that of Nancy Cantor, who was Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from 2001 to 2004 and is now President and Chancellor at Syracuse University. The many stimulating, moving, and enriching events commemorating *Brown* at Illinois during the 2003-4 academic year were first and foremost the result of her vision. Richard Herman, the current Chancellor of Illinois, has been immensely supportive of our efforts, and in his leadership at the university he has admirably promoted the ideals that stand behind *Brown*. We dedicate this volume to them.

Remembering *Brown* at Fifty

David O'Brien partially recreates here another project funded by the *Brown* commemoration, an art exhibition entitled "Social Studies: Eight Artists Address *Brown*," using reproductions of the work in the show. Many of these artworks help us to imagine the current significance of the issues at the heart of the *Brown* decision. Some of the artists explore the role of education and integration in their own lives or the lives of young people still in school. Others force us to recognize that various groups, such as homosexuals and the disabled, still endure the discrimination and bigotry that *Brown* addressed. Even for the racial and ethnic groups that the *Brown* decision had in mind, the promises of the ruling have remained unfulfilled. One of the artists in the exhibition, Carrie Mae Weems, contributes an interview here in which she reflects on the special difficulties faced by African American artists in the United States and the curious ways in which the work of African American artists "is always reduced to an expression of race and a question of class [which, in turn] becomes an easy, quick shorthand for dismissing it or not engaging with it as serious art." Weems speaks eloquently of the double-bind faced by African American artists who wish to take on racial issues but who do not want to limit their work to these issues. Referring of her recent efforts "to push the conversation to another arena," Weems notes that "it doesn't mean I am not interested in these questions [of race], but it does mean that I am endlessly limited in the ways in which the work is discussed."

Section IV: Illinois and *Brown*

The *Brown* commemoration offered an opportunity for reflection not just on the national historical significance of the decision, but also on its significance for the state of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, and the university itself. This volume preserves that aspect. Kathryn H. Anthony and Nicholas Watkins's essay, "A Legacy of Firsts," documents the history of African Americans in the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as well as the achievements of notable African American alumni. Their research reveals that while the field of architecture "has been all too slow to diversify its ranks. . . , the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has contributed significantly to the education of African American architects around the United States, perhaps more so than any other public university with the exception of historically African American schools with accredited architecture programs." Nathaniel Banks also focuses on the local context, though in his case it is the public and private schools of Champaign that occupy his attention. Banks's essay, "Reflections on the *Brown* Commemoration from a Champaign Native," offers a personal, candid, and critical assessment of the effects of efforts at integration in the Champaign schools from the point of view of a former

student in those schools, an administrator in local schools, both public and private, and a member of the school board.

Joy Ann Williamson Lott, a former Illinois PhD student currently at the University of Washington, examines the impact of the *Brown* decision on the overwhelmingly white University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and its attempts in the late 1960s to attract a higher proportion of African American students to its campus. Like many small northern cities, Champaign "maintained a firm pattern of residential and educational segregation," while the university endorsed several racist policies, creating an inhospitable environment for African American students and townsfolk alike.

Spurred on by liberal administrators, faculty, and students, as well as federal incentives, however, the university adopted a series of affirmative action plans designed to achieve racial diversity, but as late as 1967 only 223 African American undergraduates attended Illinois. In response, a more radicalized group of African American students formed the Black Students Association and, especially after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, more aggressively sought to increase African American enrollment at the university, successfully enrolling over 500 African Americans in the freshman class of fall 1968. Their arrival, however, prompted a series of peaceful protests that culminated in the arrest of over 200 of these new students in an event that the media declared was the first student riot of the 1968–69 academic year. Focusing her analysis on the climate within which African American students and university administrators discussed and often clashed over reform of the university's policies, Williamson Lott emphasizes both the achievements of black students and the price they paid to bring about reform.

Chancellor Richard Herman personalizes the issue of immigration to America by telling the story through the lens of his immigrant grandparents. In looking to the global economy and the flattening world today, he relates how immigrants over the latter half of the last century contributed to American innovation and to the greatness of the nation's universities. Herman's commitment to welcoming the world to the University of Illinois and preparing all students to participate on the global stage resonates with the best legacy of *Brown v. Board* and demonstrates that Illinois is moving in the right direction.

The final essay in this section addresses a much-neglected aspect of race relations in Illinois as well as the nation, especially outside the South. *Brown v. Board* tackled the problem of the segregation of schools in areas where different races lived in some proximity, but what if communities were racially homogeneous by design and far apart from one another? In "Enforcing *Brown* in Sundown Towns," sociologist James W. Loewen, a native Illinoisan who frequently visits to speak and lead workshops at the University of Illinois, explores a little-recognized phenomenon that still pervades the United States—the existence of

communities, whether towns or suburbs, that actively deny the right of African Americans, and other ethnic groups, to buy or rent properties or even spend the night there. According to Loewen, these “sundown” communities began to appear in every state outside of the “traditional South” in the last decade of the nineteenth century until, by the 1930s, they were the rule rather than the exception. As late as 1970 in Illinois, for example, 70 percent of towns with a population greater than a thousand were essentially all-white. They came about through a combination of local ordinances, covenants, intimidation, and violence, tactics that school districts also employed as a means of enforcing segregation.

It is an unfortunate truth that the power of the judiciary lies in the willingness of the federal government to enforce its rulings. There is no Supreme Court ruling better fitted to illustrate this than in the efforts of such states as Mississippi and South Carolina to avoid implementing *Brown*. Almost as soon as the Supreme Court announced its decision, southern states implemented a program of massive resistance to integration, and it was only with the threat, or even presence, of National Guardsmen that they finally bowed to the inevitable and integrated their school systems. Had African American activists not continually challenged the defiance of these states by attempting to integrate these schools with their own children, it is not inconceivable that *Brown* would have gone down in history as a largely symbolic, and ultimately fruitless, gesture. Since sundown communities by definition have no African American populations to dispute their legality, they have remained largely ignored by the judiciary, legislature, and civil rights activists alike.

Furthermore, the courts have generally supported the existence of sundown communities in the few instances where the phenomenon has been challenged. In *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), for example, the Supreme Court effectively ruled that so long as communities did not openly declare themselves to be all-white, it was lawful for them to be so. The Court came to this decision despite numerous incidents of violence against African American families that attempted to move into the Detroit suburbs at the center of the case. Such rulings have severely undermined the impact of *Brown* in ensuring the integration of public schools, particularly in northern communities where hostility toward African Americans has always been less explicit than in the South.

Section V: Public Intellectuals and *Brown* and Its Legacy

As part of its commemoration, the University of Illinois invited to campus a number of individuals who have played key roles as public figures in pursuing the goals of *Brown* or in communicating its ideals to a broad audience. In addition to some of the authors already mentioned, these included Julian Bond, the civil rights leader and former chair of the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People, Freeman Hrabowski III, the prominent educator and chancellor of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and the writers and journalists Juan Williams and Chris Benson.

Benson’s essay in this volume addresses a shockingly brutal but all too typical episode of racial violence from the years following the *Brown* decision. White supremacists in the South reacted to the Supreme Court’s order to end segregation predictably enough: by organizing a massive program of officially sanctioned resistance to desegregation efforts and a marked increase in the number of race crimes designed to remind African Americans of their place in Jim Crow society. One such incident occurred on August 28, 1955—just three months after the Supreme Court’s second ruling on *Brown v. Board*—when two men burst into a small home in Money, Mississippi, and spirited away a fourteen-year-old Chicago boy who was visiting relatives. They proceeded to beat and torture the boy before finally murdering him and dumping his naked body in the Tallahatchie River, where he was discovered, almost unrecognizable, three days later. The men had singled out Till for this punishment for two reasons: first, he reportedly had the audacity to whistle at the white wife of one of his murderers, and second, he was African American.

In many ways, Emmett Till’s death was anything but unusual, just one more racially motivated hate-crime designed to keep the South’s African American population firmly in check. Mississippi was the country’s poorest state and also the state with the largest African American population. Racism and violence against African Americans was an everyday fact of life. What ensured that Till’s death did not become another forgotten statistic, just one of the more than five thousand recorded lynchings since Reconstruction, was his mother’s insistence, over the objections of Mississippi authorities anxious to prevent the truth from being revealed, that his body be sent home to Chicago, where she buried him after an open-casket funeral.

Chris Benson was Illinois’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day speaker in 2005, and his essay “Just Because of the Color of His Skin: The 1955 Lynching of Emmett Till,” recounts the story of Mamie Till-Mobley, a woman who lost her son to the evil of the Jim Crow South but whose bravery and dignity inspired a generation of activists to demand equality and civil liberties for all Americans. One hundred thousand mourners viewed Till’s body as it lay in state in Chicago; the *Chicago Defender* and *JET* magazine printed photographs that people across the country and throughout the world saw. That a jury acquitted the two men identified as Till’s killers after little more than an hour of deliberations and that a month later they admitted everything in a magazine interview only made the need for the Supreme Court’s intervention all the more apparent.

Emmett Till’s death brought home to many, especially nonsoutherners, the reality of the terrorism facing African Americans living in the South, in a way



Section IV

Illinois and *Brown*

The commemoration offered the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign an opportunity to reflect not only on the national significance of *Brown*, but also on its ramifications closer to home. The essays in this section demonstrate the impact of the court case at the university, in the towns of Champaign and Urbana, and in the state of Illinois. Joy Ann Williamson Lott's essay allows us to appreciate both the achievements of black student activists in changing university policies and institutions in the era of Black Power, but she also demonstrates the enormity of the opposition they faced and the costs of their struggle. In some ways, Chancellor Richard Herman answers Lott's account of the university in the 1960s with his own essay about how diversity and immigration have helped shape greatness in American education; Herman articulates the need to welcome all new arrivals who invigorate both education and democracy. Kathryn Anthony and Nicholas Watkins document the place of black students in the university's architecture program, noting how this has been affected by the *Brown* decision and the policies that followed in its wake. Nathaniel Banks offers a frank assessment of his experience as a student and administrator in the public and private schools of Champaign. And James Loewen discusses the grim and largely unexamined history of sundown towns in Illinois.