

'You Know You From Champaign-Urbana': An Ethnography of Localized African-American Archiving Initiatives

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Abstract

Based on fieldwork conducted while directing a digital project on localized African-American histories in a particular geographically-based community, this essay develops the term “ethnic archiving initiative” to capture the emergent, contextual factors shaping the performance and reception of claims to represent ethnic identities. These claims emerge in tandem with efforts to create and use archives. Claims to represent local African-American identities overlap with claims to represent other experiences. These processes are illustrated using examples from fieldwork. Ethnography offers one means to assess the complex ways in which archiving ethnicity intersects with processes of confirming/contesting ethnic identities in everyday social interactions. Finally, I discuss how I participated in the local community to co-create the very performances analyzed in this essay.

Introduction and Theoretical Orientation

In March 2010 I moderated a small community discussion at the Frederick Douglass Branch Library in Champaign, Illinois, about a new initiative I helped create: eBlack Champaign-Urbana.¹ The eBlackCU project focuses on bringing



Splash screen for North First Street Oral History Website,

<http://eblackcu.net/portal/n1st/index.html>.

Website produced by eBlackCU high school and community college interns in Summer 2010.

together, and facilitating use of, documentation, including records, of localized African-American histories and cultures. These documents include photographs, flyers, oral histories, newsletters, administrative records, unpublished and published academic research, videos and community websites. A mixture of community elders, university students and professors, librarians, K-12 teachers, and activists attended this project planning meeting. The tensions that surfaced during our conversations illuminate theoretical and practical dilemmas that shape the work of archiving ethnicity. One major concern centered on language. The project's name derives from the eBlack Studies movement led by African-American Studies Professor and eBlackCU Primary Investigator, Abdul Alkalimat. For him, "Black" refers to Black Power and struggles to self-determine a diasporically-rooted national identity.² To some community elders, however, the term "Black" carried pejorative connotations related to memories of the term's historical use

in local media. They recalled reading about “bad blacks” as opposed to “good negroes.” One woman, a leader of the local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women, believed that “Negro” was still a viable term, “because that’s what we are.”³ This tension over language brings to the surface the fact that claims to represent ethnic groups are never transparently “authentic” or “inauthentic,” but are instead more complexly performed and received based on historically emergent social interactions. A second tension related to divergent opinions about how to frame ethnic archiving. One activist, seconded by a community elder, argued that the project should create something that would encompass the entire Champaign-Urbana community, while still making concerted efforts to foreground African-American experiences, thereby avoiding the trap of essentializing ethnic difference. However, others at the meeting were concerned that such an approach would marginalize the distinct experiences of self-described members of the local African-American community. One participant noted that “the history and contributions of African American citizens has all but been ignored in Champaign County.” She implied that a project for everyone would lead to continuing silence on the significance of African-American experiences in local public culture.

Participants in the eBlackCU project expressed diverse understandings about what it means to archive ethnicity. These diverse perspectives emerge out of different views of what it means to be African-American in the local area of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. As participants interacted with the project, they made sense of eBlackCU by referring to personal knowledge of similar projects that had emerged in the local area in the past. Over the last century, oral history projects, photograph books, documentation projects, newsletters, documentaries, museum exhibits, Facebook groups, church history committees, plays, artworks and other initiatives have emerged as attempts to document and project the significance of local African-American experiences.⁴ I use the term “ethnic archiving initiative” to encompass these heterogeneous projects. This term de-centers the work of professionally-staffed archives, contextualizing them in the more fluid ways in which communities use documentation, including records, to perform ethnic identities over time. I find the term “initiative” preferable to “community archives” or “community-based archives,”⁵ since it emphasizes the short temporal duration of these efforts, at least in Champaign-Urbana. In this local setting I have found that ethnic archiving initiatives accrue energy for a certain amount of time – anywhere from a few months to a decade – before losing momentum as key stakeholders pass away, lose interest, or for other reasons are no longer capable of maintaining projects.

In this essay, I attempt to understand these processes by foregrounding performances in ethnic archiving initiatives. Even if an initiative does not endure as an archives, per se, it nonetheless has enduring effects both on local ethnic identities and on future initiatives. Margaret Hedstrom has argued that “archives are mobilized to discover or recover evidence that has been lost or denied to

communities seeking memory.”⁶ In contrast, I critically use constructivist theories to argue that ethnic communities also use archives to project, perform and contest particular visions of what constitutes an ethnic community.⁷ According to anthropologist Edward M. Bruner “cultures continually invent and reinvent themselves” through performances.⁸ These performances include texts, documents and records. The ceaseless re-invention of culture through performance does not preclude strategic essentialisms that may be deployed by marginalized groups to forward political struggles, including struggles for memory and recognition, nor does it preclude performances in the present bearing traces of historical processes.⁹ Performance theory has tended to frame archives as antagonistic to the repertoires of living cultures.¹⁰ In contrast, work in archival theory has foregrounded the roles of performance in both traditional¹¹ and non-traditional¹² archival endeavors. In an essay on African American archives, Rabia Gibbs notes that “the public images presented [in African American history and archives] represent not incidental capture but *purposeful construction*.”¹³ This essay extends these discussions by exploring how performance bridges traditional and non-traditional archival endeavors, creating new types of archivally-mediated ethnic identities and genres of cultural production. I found during field-work in Champaign-Urbana two processes shaping the work of archiving ethnicity: 1) individuals and groups performing their visions of local ethnic identities, for themselves and for outsiders, by participating in ethnic archiving initiatives; and 2) individuals and groups using objects produced in ethnic archiving initiatives in subsequent performances of ethnic identity.

Methods

The eBlackCU project emerged into a swirling mix of ongoing ethnic archiving initiatives. These efforts included Facebook groups (e.g. You Know You From Champaign-Urbana), an African-American youth oral history project led by a public media outlet, the acquisition of the papers of a local Black activist by a unit of the University of Illinois Library, annual community reunions that used historical documents, including records, and dozens of research projects led by University faculty and students.¹⁴ In this context, the eBlackCU initiative exists as a node in a complex, ever-evolving socio-technical network of people, information, institutions and repertoires which residents of the local community use to perform ethnic identities. This essay foregrounds how I came to understand this network through ethnographic fieldwork, which involved participant observation, unstructured interviewing and archival research in a variety of public and private institutions and spaces throughout Champaign-Urbana.

To present this analysis I focus on three topics: 1) the past as performed in the present, 2) the past as performed in the past, and 3) the situated contexts of these



The homepage of eBlack Champaign-Urbana (eBlackCU) as of fall 2012. Logo and site design created by community college intern, Jaime Carpenter.

performances. I first reflect on how the eBlackCU project emerged in tandem with similar digital grassroots ethnic archiving initiatives. To understand these initiatives, I analyze performances during the creation and use of ethnic archiving initiatives over the past thirty years. I illustrate how these historical performance repertoires shaped the eBlackCU project. I also discuss how I attempted to adapt the project to these repertoires.¹⁵ Finally, I sketch how this type of ethnographic analysis of performance can assist archivists and archival educators interested in the work of archiving ethnicity.

From Identity to Identities, From Initiative to Initiatives

In winter 2009 I started noticing ethnic archiving work emerging on the social networking site Facebook. I first observed, and then started participating with, individuals and groups sharing personal documents and memories of local African-American experiences on Facebook walls/timelines, and within local history groups. Participants on Facebook perform ethnic identities in diverse forms. Many self-described African-American members of the “You Know You Grew Up in Champaign-Urbana” group make no overt mention of ethnicity, or its salience to their identity, as they participate in virtual reminiscing about local experiences. However, at certain points some individuals find it necessary to perform local ethnic identities in more overt ways. In a forum on “restaurants” one man reminds others in the group that African-Americans in Champaign-Urbana have distinct historical experiences: “Growing up in northeast Champaign [the historical African-American community] ... I remember some restaurants that you may

or may not remember in the summer months there were temporary Bar-B-Q Pits in screen houses - with the smell of Bar-B-Q in the air all summer long.”

This man performs his knowledge of a distinctly African-American experience in an online local history group that, structurally, makes no explicit ethnic distinctions. In other cases, individuals form virtual groups in which African-Americans can reminisce together without having to perform for outsiders. During summer and fall 2011, three groups emerged on Facebook to share local African-American memories. The titles of two of these groups – “You Know You From Champaign-Urbana” and “You Know You Old If?” – perform African-American identity through a strategic use of African-American Vernacular English to mark the spaces as distinct. Nonetheless, these three groups are largely disconnected from each other. Participants in these different groups share amongst themselves slightly different meanings of what it means to be African-American in Champaign-Urbana based on generationally distinct identities.

As I reflected on these online practices, I began to see parallels and continuities in ethnic archiving initiatives from the past. In local counter-public spheres,¹⁶ I found complex politics of belonging shaping performances of historically-situated ethnic identities. For example, in the 1960s a number of large, local African-American families began organizing and documenting annual summer reunions. These families decided to collaborate amongst themselves to organize an annual community reunion, which became known as Champaign-Urbana Days (CU Days). Over time, this grassroots reunion became an official event coordinated by the Champaign Park District. Every year the event features displays of community and family histories. Tensions have emerged over who has the authority to represent the community’s past in this counter-public space. For many years, African-American individuals not part of the historic families that initially organized the reunion felt they could not fully participate in the event. For these individuals, the shift of CU Days’ authority from local families to the Park District was a good thing, enabling more democratic participation. For many descendants of the families, in contrast, the shift of authority represented a co-optation that resulted in diminished self-determination. Similar politics of belonging have shaped performances of the past in church anniversaries and in the local African-American-owned media.

Similar processes shape ethnic archiving initiatives within the mainstream public sphere, as represented by archives, libraries, museums, media outlets and historical societies. In these public initiatives, ethnic identities have frequently been essentialized as small numbers of African-Americans in largely white-led organizations use the initiatives to construct a public image they feel represents the community as a whole. However, the ultimate meaning of the initiatives, and the identities produced within them, remain open. After initiatives conclude, individuals and groups appropriate the documentation produced for diverse purposes that transcend the initiatives’ original goals. The questions become: Whose

community is performed? Whose vision of the past prevails in both public and counter-public spheres? To illustrate these processes, I focus on three examples from the last three decades.

The Social Life of Ethnic Archiving Initiatives

In the early 1980s a photographer worked with a historical society on a book and exhibit project known as “In All My Years: Portraits of Older Blacks in Champaign-Urbana.” To make the project a success, the society invited the African-American director of Champaign’s Douglass Branch Library to participate on the project’s planning committee. This librarian performed research and produced the contacts and public support necessary for the project. The book produced features approximately 50 individual portraits accompanied with short biographical sketches. The narrative performed in the text centers on individual resilience, entrepreneurial success, and a strong sense of community. Little mention appears of enduring obstacles, structural inequalities, or community tensions.

Since the initiative emerged from a virtually all-white organization, one may predict that it is an unlikely candidate to become one of most important memory objects among local African-Americans. However, during fieldwork I found that the book circulates in many homes, businesses, churches and community centers as a cherished document – some call it a record – of local African-American experiences. During meetings and conversations about the eBlackCU project, the book was the most frequently referred to model of how to do ethnic archiving right. What appealed to my interlocutors was the fact that they could browse through the photographs, using them as prompts to perform for others personal memories of the individuals, groups and community experiences represented. In these processes, individuals largely ignored the official narrative of the text, instead using it as a vehicle for their own purposes. The affordances of this book function analogously to patterns I saw emerging in cyberspace. Online, individuals came together around historical photographs from diverse sources to create emergent spaces for collective reminiscing about shared pasts that are not determined by the photographs themselves.

The book also inspired a popular exhibit in the early 2000’s produced through collaboration between a local African-American historian, the local chapter of the National Council of Negro Women, a white-run local history museum, and a group of seniors that called themselves the Champaign County African American History Committee. The exhibit featured photographs and short biographies of approximately 100 local African-American women. The central actor shaping the exhibit was a local African-American historian with no formal training in history or archives. During the 1990s, this woman amassed what, in her own terms, was an “archive of local African-American history.”¹⁷ Her community archive con-

sisted of items collected during her research, and from donations of scrapbooks, commemorative booklets, oral histories and other documents. The project tended to focus, as did the previously mentioned photography book, on positive stories of African-American middle-class accomplishment and resilience. According to stakeholders, the project made a concerted effort to ensure that “politics” did not play a role in ethnic archiving. This concerted avoidance of something socially constructed as “political” bears resemblance to what Richard Handler and Eric Gable describe as a “just-the-facts” ideology permeating the deployment of new social history, especially African-American history, at Colonial Williamsburg. Handler and Gable describe how a fixation with “facts” blinded progressive staff members, both Black and white, from publicly acknowledging the always narrativized nature of history.¹⁸ Similarly, stakeholders in this ethnic archiving initiative articulated a belief in the power of what they framed as a-political “facts” offering a corrective to what they saw as the too-politicized narratives of African-American history offered by Black radicals.

This aversion to “politics” among stakeholders involved in the archiving initiative did not prevent political contestation of authority over the initiative following the local historian’s death in 2004. In her will, she donated her archive to the director of the local history museum with whom she had collaborated over the last decade. The historian’s expectations were that the museum director would use the archive to continue her project of celebrating local African-American history through public programming. This move produced much controversy. Owing to public pressure, the museum director felt compelled to have lawyers review the will to ascertain the legality of the archive’s new home. Years after the transfer some, but certainly not all, in the local community still feel their historical documents have been made inaccessible. It would be impossible to completely capture the diverse reasons lying behind these tensions. However, accessibility, rather than custody, motivated at least some individuals’ anger. For example, a local activist vocalized his approval of a plan to make the documents digitally accessible through eBlackCU, as well as physically accessible through a proposed (but never implemented) plan to transfer the documents to a local public library. For him, and for others with whom I discussed this matter, the main source of anger came from the fact that the records were located in a museum 15 miles west of Champaign-Urbana, with no easy access points that could transform the documents into assets that could enrich contemporary community life. To her credit, the museum director labored greatly to alleviate this sentiment. In 2009 she asked me to help her produce a finding aid for the papers, and to help her think of other ways to enhance accessibility.¹⁹ In addition, a number of individuals remain steadfast in their support of both the museum and its director. The National Council of Negro Women continued until 2012, when personal pressures interceded, to elect the white museum director as the official historian of the group.

Ethnic Archiving Initiatives in Mainstream Archives

The two projects sketched above emerged outside the context of professionally-staffed archives. However, similar dynamics play out within archives. The University of Illinois Archives has played a role in these dynamics,²⁰ but more prominent has been the Champaign County Historical Archives, located in the Urbana Free Library. In the late 1970s the archives began an oral history initiative that, in its early years, focused almost exclusively on white individuals that had direct experience of agricultural life. In the early 1980s the project's focus shifted as, with support from a federal grant, the archives hired young African-Americans to lead an oral history project to document the life stories of older African-Americans. The project's work grew out of a partnership with the Douglass Branch Library of the Champaign Public Library. Since the founding of the Douglass Branch in the 1970s as a community-run institution explicitly charged with providing library services for the local African-American community, it has been widely perceived, especially among generations that came of age in the 1970s, as a community asset.²¹ This perception of the library as a legitimate community space by both outsiders and insiders has led to regular incorporations of the library into ethnic archiving initiatives as a means to give a sense of legitimacy and authenticity to these projects.

Complex processes of appropriation emerged after the oral history initiative concluded. In 2009, the current director of the Douglass Branch Library, also African-American, began digitizing the oral history interviews deposited in the library. She believed the oral histories were produced entirely by the Branch Library, and had no recollections or records indicating the Champaign County Historical Archives had played any role in the project. This excising of the archives' role continues in the ways in which the project is displayed in online metadata. As of January 2013, the library catalog continues to announce the "Douglass Branch Library oral histories," with no mention of the archives. In this act, the library redefines the conditions under which the ethnic archiving initiative emerged, performing a new context for the oral history project to reflect a narrative of autonomous ethnic archiving. Reading this erasure of the Champaign County Historical Archives requires great care. The incident bares similarities to the account of Michel-Rolph Trouillot on the erasure in public memory of Columbus in contemporary Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Trouillot describes an encounter with a peddling artist who insists that a nearby statue of a stocky, white male (possibly Columbus) is in fact a depiction of a thin dark man (Charlemagne Péralte) who fought against the 1920s' American occupation.²² Just as it is impossible for Trouillot to know why exactly this peddler insisted this visibly white statue represented a Black liberation figure, it is impossible to know why in 2013 the Champaign County Historical Archives was erased from metadata descriptions of an oral history project it led in the early 1980s. The fact of its erasure, however, and the performance of this

silence, can be read as a means to uncover the freighted processes of remembering and forgetting as they intersect with ethnic archiving initiatives.

The dynamics sketched above indelibly shaped both how the eBlackCU project performed ethnic identities and how the project was appropriated by members of the local community for their own performances. Politics of belonging complicated public participation in the eBlackCU project from the beginning. Early in the project we (Professor Alkalimat and I) began working with a local minister who was then also the director of the local Black Chamber of Commerce. As fieldwork progressed, we began to learn of the divisive role this individual played in the local community. This growing cognizance of community fault-lines profoundly affected our work. I was told by one community elder that individuals in the community would refuse to work with us because of our association with this man. Salient in critiques of his ability to represent the local African-American community was the fact that he did not grow up in Champaign-Urbana. One activist complained that the minister “had only been in town since 1970,” implying that despite residence in the local community for over 40 years, he was still an inauthentic voice of the *local* African-American experience. However, at the same time, this man clearly had his local champions, including the head minister of the second-oldest historically African-American church in Champaign County and the individuals that elected him president of the local Black Chamber of Commerce. The point I wish to make here is that claims to represent community experience are always contested.²³ I believe any individual with whom we worked closely at the outset of the project would have profoundly affected the project in different, but no less profound, ways.²⁴



Difference Makers at eBlackCU Campus-Community Symposium, held at the Graduate School of Library & Information Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on November 5, 2013.

Individuals in this photograph were featured in a collective biography booklet released at the event, and available online at <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/18077>. In diverse ways, participants in this event invest themselves in the past, present and future of African-American life, community and culture in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Their participation in the eBlackCU project grew out of their existing investment in the local community.

Photograph courtesy Noah Lenstra.

In November 2010, eBlackCU organized a campus-community symposium. At the center of the two-day event was the release of a collective biography booklet celebrating over 100 “difference makers” in the lives of local African-Americans. The publication’s content came from user-contributed autobiographical statements and photographs. This participatory opportunity to celebrate community members’ accomplishments inspired, among other motivations, over 250 people to attend the symposium. One attendee – a long-time employee at the university – said she had never seen so many members of the community on campus, during the middle of the academic semester, on a weekday, at any time in the past.²⁵ Central to the event’s success was the release of the publication co-created from the photographs and memories of participants submitted to the project.

Performance Repertoires Bridge Initiatives

During fieldwork I found that archives play fluid, contingent roles in performances of ethnic identity. These performances take on various forms, and self-described African-Americans are not the only ones doing the performing. I played a strong role in shaping performances that used eBlackCU’s digitized content in local and virtual public forums. During the summer of 2012, I posted to eBlackCU’s Facebook group a clipping from a local African-American newspaper that included photographs of 12 African-American ministers of local churches. The comments the photograph elicited illustrate a cognizance of the performer/audience relationship shaping this interaction. Comments included “OOOOOO Noah this is great!;” “Noah, this is priceless! Thank you & everyone at eBlackCU!;” “thanks for sharing!;” “the past and present.. thanks;” and “PRICELESS!!!!.” By appealing to local individuals’ desires to participate in the celebration of the histories of their community institutions (i.e. churches) in a collective, public setting, my use of material digitized by eBlackCU successfully fit within local repertoires of remembering. By sharing these digitized images on Facebook I was trying to fit into the ways in which I had seen others in the community share memories and photographs both online and in face-to-face settings like anniversaries. I cannot claim “success” according to any quantitative rubric; however I will claim that my ability to interact in this setting shows that the effectiveness of ethnic archiving initiatives do not always depend on the “authentic identity” of the individual leading the initiative. Rather, they depend more on complex, situational knowledge that, in my opinion, is best acquired through ethnographic fieldwork.

I cannot predict the complex ways in which the documentation digitized by eBlackCU will be appropriated for future performances of ethnic identity. However, a brief anecdote suggests that, as in the past, individuals and groups will find ways of using the project for their own purposes. In 2011, a school-wide talent show, the annual fundraiser of a local high school’s African-American Club, was

under threat. Despite the fact that the talent show is open to the entire student body, some students and teachers felt that the show's control by the African-American Club created a divisive context that blocked full student participation. In order to defend the club and its continuing importance, the club's director and student members used digitized documents placed online by eBlackCU to create a multi-media powerpoint presentation. The club performed this presentation during a school assembly in February 2012 to educate others about the fact that the club is open to all. This presentation, along with other tactics, produced success. As of early 2013, the club continues to sponsor and direct the talent show. How members of an ethnic group decide who does and does not belong within the group shifts based on implicit and explicit objectives members of the group wish to achieve. In this performance, the club articulated a vision in which African-American cultural forms and spaces can be used by all as long as there is general recognition of the rights of ethnic self-determination in spatially and socially demarcated spaces. Digitized content from eBlackCU functioned as one resource among many others used in this performance.

Conclusions: Ethnography, Archives, and Performance

In this essay I have argued that performances of ethnicity have histories, and these histories matter a great deal in the production and appropriation of ethnic archiving initiatives in the present. By foregrounding performance, I orient discussion of ethnic archiving towards the situationally emergent interactions that shape social identities. I have argued that performances do not emerge on top of authentic, core identities; rather, performances constitute reality. These interactions both shape and are shaped by complex power relations. In addition to structural inequalities and struggles for recognition in mainstream public culture, politics of belonging profoundly shape the stories group members tell themselves about themselves.

Understanding ethnographically how these dynamics develop and play out over time will, I believe, help archivists and archival educators do more nuanced work to archive ethnicity. Applications of this method could include service-learning projects with ethnographic components, or staff continuing education that focuses on understanding contexts shaping archives and archiving initiatives. I believe this type of work can help archivists remain open and attuned to the unexpected ways in which power and performance shape archival endeavors in all their dimensions.

Endnotes

1. This paper derives from a multi-year study that benefitted from a great deal of support in the local area. I would like to especially acknowledge the Community Informatics Research Lab at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library & Information Science, co-directed by Kate Williams and Abdul Alkalimat, which supervised this research. The University Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement financially supported the project. From beginning to end, leaders and members of local community organizations made this work possible.
2. Abdul Alkalimat, "eBlack Studies: A Twenty-First-Century Challenge," *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics & Culture* 2, no. 3 (2000): 69-76; Abdul Alkalimat and Ronald Bailey, "From Black to eBlack: The Digital Transformation of Black Studies Pedagogy," *Fire!!!: The Multimedia Journal of Black Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 9-24.
3. Reflecting these complex opinions on language and identity, in this paper I use the terms "African-American" and "Black" interchangeably to refer to individuals and groups that self-consciously identify with African-American and Afro-Diasporic cultures in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. To reflect the privacy of research participants in this study, no personal names, except for University-based project leaders, are included in this paper. Following accepted ethnographic practice, I only use direct quotes for statements recorded in fieldnotes or by recording devices at the time they were uttered in my presence as a participant observer, not for accounts retrospectively produced. See Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 51.
4. This essay focuses on efforts that have emerged since local civil rights struggles in the 1950s and early 1960s. Earlier efforts were rarely mentioned during field-work, so I have not focused on them in this essay. Earlier initiatives include: local participation in national forums like "Negro History Week" and Chicago's *The Defender*, and projects in churches to collect the documents of church history for use in anniversary celebrations and commemorative booklets.
5. On community archives, see Andrew Flinn, "Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no. 2 (2007): 151-176; on community-based archives, see Kelvin L. White and Anne J. Gilliland, "Promoting Reflexivity and Inclusivity in Archival Education, Research, and Practice," *The Library Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2010): 231-248.
6. Margaret Hedstrom, "Archives and Collective Memory: More than a Metaphor, Less than an Analogy," in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, eds. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited, 2010), 176.
7. Richard Schechner, "Foreword: Fundamentals of Performance Studies," in *Teaching Performance Studies*, eds. Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), ix-xii. The theoretical framework in this essay has been influenced by anthropologist and folklorist Charles Briggs's work on how power dynamics shape local cultural repertoires and locally-conceived notions of "authenticity." See Charles L. Briggs, "The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the 'Invention of Tradition,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 4 (1996): 435-469. See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge:

- Harvard University Press, 1993) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998). For a discussion of the subtle distinctions among the terms “performances,” “performance,” “performative,” see Franklin, Adrian, “Performing Live: An Interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,” *Tourist Studies* 1, no. 3 (2001): 211-232.
8. Edward M. Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 160.
 9. Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 138-159.
 10. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 20.
 11. Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3 (2002): 171-185.
 12. Jeannette A. Bastian, “The Records of Memory, the Archives of Identity: Celebrations, Texts and Archival Sensibilities,” *Archival Science* DOI: 10.1007/s10502-012-9184-3 (2013): 2.
 13. My emphasis. Rabia Gibbs, “The Heart of the Matter: The Developmental History of African American Archives,” *American Archivist* 75, no. 1 (2012): 200.
 14. Some of this material is documented in Noah Lenstra, ed., *Community Engagement @ Illinois: Connecting Research and Service* (Urbana: eBlackCU.net, 2010): <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/17462>.
 15. In this essay, I necessarily give a very incomplete narrative of the eBlackCU project itself. For more on this project see Noah Lenstra and Abdul Alkalimat, “eBlack Studies as Digital Community Archives: A Proof of Concept Study in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois,” *Fire!!!: The Multimedia Journal of Black Studies* 1, no. 2 (2013): 151-184; and Noah Lenstra, “e-Black Champaign-Urbana: Community Informatics and Cultural Heritage Information in a Low-Income Community” (Certificate of Advanced Study Final Paper, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011).
 16. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25, no. 26 (1990): 56-80.
 17. This description appears in the accession records of the archive, located at the museum where the archive is currently located.
 18. Eric Gable and Richard Handler, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 78-101. Cruikshank documents similar trends in her analysis of how Yukon heritage is constructed as “a-political” through its performance in civic folk festivals; see Cruikshank, 138-159.

19. Museum of the Grand Prairie, Champaign County Forest Preserve, "Finding Aid for Doris K. Wylie Hoskins Archive for Cultural Diversity," August 13, 2010, <http://eblackcu.net/portal/items/show/3>.
20. See John Straw, Ellen Swain and Chris Prom, "Guide to African-American Research Resources," University of Illinois Archives, last modified 2003, <http://archives.library.illinois.edu/guides/afamer.php>. During fieldwork I found that a number of local African-American historians make use of the University of Illinois Archives in their local history work.
21. See Michael Burns, "The Rhetorics of Community Space: Critical Events in Champaign-Urbana's Black Freedom Movement" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012).
22. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 154-156.
23. For the general theoretical argument about the always problematic nature of claiming that personal experience represents community or ethnic experience, see Amy Shuman, *Other People's Stories: Entitlement Claims and the Critique of Empathy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
24. This argument is the familiar argument about the importance of gatekeepers in ethnographic fieldwork. See Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (New York City: Routledge, 2007), especially 41-96.
25. See eBlackCU, "eBlackChampaign-Urbana Campus-Community Symposium Multi-Media Archive: Community Engagement Rountable," November 5, 2010, <http://eblackcu.net/portal/schedule>.