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What Makes Students Bleed Orange and Blue?: An In-depth Look at Block I

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We wanted to take an in-depth look into the Block I student section at Illini home football games. My partner, John Aguilar, focused on the history and past of the section, while my main focus was when Block I moved and its current activities. We wanted to find out everything that was behind this historic student section and why students continue to be so loyal to the orange and blue there, even if the football team is not playing up to expectations.

The loyalty of U of I students to the Fighting Illini and/or the Chief at sporting events and throughout the university in general is very strong. I wanted to discover what is behind this; what makes these college students become so supportive to the Fighting Illini? Specifically, at the football games in the Block I student section. What makes these students so supportive of the orange and blue? How this section organized and what is the history and traditions of this historic student section? These were the questions I wanted to answer throughout my research on this topic. Although I did not find out as much as I would have liked about the certain traditions the students in the Block I participate in, I did find information about the card stunts done at halftime of every home game.

Using various articles from the Daily Illini newspaper, I found an abundant amount of information about how, why, and student reactions to the moving of the Block I section from

the east side of the stadium near midfield to the north end zone. The construction of the new location of the Block I at the north end zone was entitled the "Illinois Renaissance" project. The move was done primarily so the noise from the students would be directed toward the entire stadium and it would allow for a greater amount of students in the section. The students' reaction was all basically the same. They did not like the move at all at first, but eventually the new seats grew on them and they found a new liking for the north end zone. Also, reading through the Illini Pride website I found out what the leaders of Block I (Blockheads) have to do every week in preparation for a game and how the card stunts at halftime are created. Among the duties for the Blockheads are, go to all home games, attend weekly meetings, and help set up any equipment prior to the football games. The card stunts are created through a computer program and it tells which seats use which card at what time. Though I did not use as many sources as I had originally planned on, I did find plenty of information on what I was looking for and did learn a lot from what I did find out.

In class, we view many ethnographic films and read many other different pieces of ethnography. Two films that stuck out to me and related back to my project in some way were, "In Whose Honor?" and "Trobriand Cricket: An Ingenious Response to Colonialism". "In Whose Honor?" was about Chief Illiniwek and how his dances and clothing are not as authentic as they may seem and aspects of what he does are in fact offensive to Native Americans. I related this to my project because even though the face of the Chief is gone, his spirit still lives on. At football games, the students sing the Alma Mater and the fight song and remember the Chief as the face of U of I that unites all that attend the university, rather than just an offensive mascot that means no good. "Trobriand Cricket: An Ingenious Response to Colonialism" was

about a civilization that revolved around the game of cricket. Each tribe has their own team and is very passionate toward their team. These teams come out dancing to their own original chants in order to intimidate their opponents. This reminded me of how the Block I has its own chants to intimidate any team that enters Memorial Stadium that doesn't have Fighting Illini on their jersey's. Every tribe also supports their team no matter what, just like the students that attend the football games at U of I.

Looking at an article in Ideals, "How Can Anti-Chief Fan Exist in a Pro-Chief World?", I read about how U of I students that are against the Chief are essentially excluded because school spirit basically revolves around the Chief. However, I argue that being a diehard fan of the Fighting Illini does not necessarily mean you have to support the Chief, though the Chief is a major part of this university. One can still love the orange and blue by attending U of I and show support at sporting events such as football games and sitting in Block I. Just because you do not support the Chief does not mean you do not support your school or have school spirit.

My general research was done primarily online. I used the "ask a librarian" tool on the UIUC undergraduate library website, which led me to a search engine that had all of the Daily Illini articles in it. I found many articles on or relating to Block I, most of them about the move and various reactions from students and faculty. I also did a Google search on Block I, which took me to the Illini Pride website. This website had history of Block I and information on the leaders of the section and how it is organized currently. Overall, I did not mind working in an online environment, although I wish I had done some research somewhere other than just online to find out more. Archiving my data appeals to me because it can possibly help others in some way in the future with their research project.

My advice to future EUI students is to definitely use the “ask a librarian” if they get stuck with their research. They are very helpful and you can do it from your own computer at your convenience. Because it is actual people talking to you at the other end and not a computer, it is very easy to find what you are looking for. Block I is a good topic to research because it is so historic and there is so much information behind its history and even the current activities the students in Block I participate in.

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