The Third World Strike and other events like it created a new academic field. Black students across the country demanded academic programs offering black history, arts, and social science. Professors and administrators used black studies for many reasons: to pursue novel intellectual agendas, diversify a college’s faculty and course offerings, offer social support for black students, encourage discussions between blacks and whites, or mollify disruptive students. During the five years after the strike, from 1969 to 1974, approximately 120 degree programs were created (see Figure 6.1). Dozens of other black studies units, such as research centers and nondegree programs, were also created; 9 percent of universities now offer black studies degrees. The early 1970s witnessed other key events, such as the founding of journals and professional associations dedicated solely to black studies. Doctoral programs would come a bit later, but by 1973 black studies had developed the infrastructure that an academic field needs for its long-term survival.

Black studies benefited from the excitement of the early 1970s, the intense time after King’s assassination and the ensuing urban riots. Students and black intellectuals felt that educational institutions were ripe for change. Black studies headed an educational vanguard transforming predominantly white institutions. Many saw black studies as the first in a series of academic fields that would challenge social hierarchies and diversify the academy. Soon after black studies programs appeared, ethnic studies and women’s studies followed. Dec-
ades later, other academic enterprises were framed as liberationist, such as cultural studies and gay and lesbian studies.

What is less obvious in these accounts, but well known to professors and administrators, is that the energy behind black studies was not enough to promote the field’s growth through the 1970s and 1980s. The field faced severe problems during this time. Some of these challenges affected all of academia, not just black studies. The late 1970s were a time of financial crisis in higher education. Universities continually cut budgets and engaged in sustained hiring freezes. Inflation decimated endowments and financial gifts to universities. Other problems were specific to black studies. Many administrators remained hostile. They refused to approve hires or budget increases, even when budgets recovered and stabilized in the 1980s. Students were less enthusiastic about black studies once civil rights and black power politics receded in importance. It was hard to recruit majors, especially when black students, like most undergraduates, were more likely to pursue vocational courses of study.

Black studies programs struggled during this time, and some units closed. Victims of hostile administrators and flagging enrollments, these programs withered until their enrollments and funds were claimed by other units in the universities. But that is only one side of the story. Other programs showed great resilience. Professors and program chairs were able to stand their ground and survive. The programs that survived—and most did—are now experiencing a renaissance. Encouraged by renewed undergraduate interest and the resuscitation of the field at elite research universities, many programs have increased their enrollments and hired more faculty members.

This chapter looks at how black studies programs survived in the 1970s and 1980s. The goal is to understand how black studies programs were created and then flourished within the university. Two questions motivate my treatment of this topic. First, how was black studies initially framed and justified? A political movement will generate a range of alternatives to existing social arrangements. Different proposals must survive attacks by critics, competition with other proposals for financial resources and attention, and meetings in which leaders decide to reject a proposal or continue an idea’s development. Therefore, it is important to understand how various black studies proposals were justified by their sponsors.

A theme emerging from the narrative is that students with a nationalist bent tended to view black studies as a service to the African American community. In contrast, other activists viewed black studies as comparable to area studies,
such as Africa or China studies. The different ideas motivating black studies were usually linked to different organizational structures, which were not approved by university leaders. For example, some students and professors thought that black studies should be “community controlled,” which meant that the programs would have a governing board similar to those found in public elementary and secondary schools. This organizational structure made it difficult for university administrators to accept proposals associated with the community. A key point of this chapter is that a community orientation for black studies prevented its implementation in many universities. I find that black studies succeeded when it was organized as a more traditional academic enterprise.

The second question I address is, how did black studies programs survive inside the university? What could program chairs and professors do to defend their turf? Which university rules and practices protect or undermine programs? This chapter shows how black studies’ survival depended on the political skill of its advocates and institutional rules that protected programs in times of remission. Framing black studies as a natural outgrowth of the academic disciplines does not protect it from later charges of academic illegitimacy, administrative neglect, or declining enrollments. Black studies survived because its advocates were able to navigate the university’s bureaucratic environment and because university budgeting and staffing rules protect academic departments in times of remission.

My arguments are illustrated by three case studies of institutions that created, or tried to create, black studies programs: the University of Illinois at Chicago, a branch of Illinois’s public university system; the University of Chicago, an elite, private research university on the South Side of Chicago; and Harvard University. I chose these three schools because all are urban research universities, all experienced black student protest, and all had black studies programs that suffered in the 1970s and 1980s. But each program evolved in different ways. Black studies nearly disappeared at the University of Chicago, stabilized at Illinois, and experienced a renaissance at Harvard. Although each university started from the same place, the outcomes were starkly different. Their similarities allow one to focus on the actions of individuals within institutions, rather than the confounding effects of geography or political context. For each of these three campuses, this chapter discusses black student politics in the mid-1960s, the protests leading to demands for black studies, and the different ways that black studies departments were helped or sabotaged by students, professors, administrators, and the rules that govern universities.
Protest Opens the Door

This section describes black student politics at the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Harvard University. At each of these universities, two years of protest and nationalist activities preceded black studies debates. For the most part, these protests were not carried out with the intention of forming a Department of Black Studies, but they created an opportunity for interested individuals to introduce black studies at a later time. Black students usually agitated for concessions such as black housing and increased black enrollments. Community members often used the campus as a stage for voicing grievances about how universities ignored or hampered the development of the neighborhoods where they were located. At these three universities, the challenges to authority created moments when professors and students felt they could promote black studies. Normal decision-making procedures were temporarily suspended, giving a wide range of actors the opportunity to affect university agendas.

Black Protest at the University of Chicago

Black protest at the University of Chicago resembled black protest at many other university campuses. Protests were sometimes tied to nationalist politics and at other times were motivated by city politics. For example, in the 1967–1968 academic year, radical black activists visited the campus. On November 17, 1967, a worker for the Chicago Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) gave a speech saying that SNCC headquarters would move to the city of Chicago. He stated that SNCC’s activities were explicitly modeled on the revolutionary movements of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹ Lerone Bennett, editor of *Ebony* and black history advocate, proclaimed to students that “black power is the only alternative to disaster in this country.”² Other campus disruptions were related to local urban issues. For example, black youth gangs started to appear on campus, sometimes violently fighting each other and in one case trying to hold a “peace conference” to resolve their disputes.³

This wave of black mobilizing culminated in 1968. During the spring, black students demanded that the University of Chicago create black student quotas and a program to increase black enrollment.⁴ They also demanded an all-black dormitory.⁵ At the end of the spring of 1968, black students marched on the administration building and demanded that the provost concede these de-
mands and create all-black housing. Feeling that the university was unresponsive, black students briefly occupied the administration building and reiterated their demands. The campus newspaper reported that admissions quotas and separate all-black housing would not be granted, but that the university would permit the establishment of all-black housing via an informal housing transfer.6

The building occupation lasted only a few hours, but it set in motion a sequence of events that would introduce black studies to the University of Chicago. Faculty members created an informal committee to consider black issues, including new courses and programs. The committee organized a series of public meetings among black students, intellectuals, and professors. In response to these events, the College of the University of Chicago established an ad hoc, but official, committee that would consider demands for African American studies and curricular reform within the Division of the Humanities. The committee became the forum where faculty members would introduce black studies.

Black Protest at the University of Illinois at Chicago

Students had been protesting at the University of Illinois at Chicago since the campus opened in 1966. As at the University of Chicago, prominent participants in the black power movement visited the campus. Stokely Carmichael spoke there, and Black Panther rallies were held.7 Paul Boutelle, vice presidential candidate of the Socialist Workers Party, visited the campus advocating black power.8 The actions of administrators and students exacerbated the situation. In the fall of 1966, administrators tried to place restrictions on the types of speakers that student groups could invite to campus.9 As at many other campuses, this regulation of student activity provoked protest, resulting in the first major sit-in of 1967.10 The conflict was partially resolved when the restriction was lifted and students were allowed to sit on the university committee regulating student activities. Protests regarding student clubs continued into 1968 and were followed by vigorous antiwar protests, which set the stage for black student mobilization and calls for black studies.

In January 1968, a massive antiwar rally was staged at the school’s Chicago Circle campus. Protesting students occupied the university’s twenty-seven-story high-rise administration building. The sit-in eventually ended but not without conflict among the students. The cause of the conflict is unknown, but black and white antiwar protesters attacked each other. Police forcibly removed students from the building because of the fights. Some reports suggest that there was a history of interracial violence on the campus. There were subse-
quent charges that black student issues were ignored by the university. The student government authorized a proposal to “investigate” black issues, and the Black Student Organization for Communication (BSOC) was formed soon after.¹¹

The BSOC became the most active black student group on campus. BSOC members lobbied in November 1968 to have black student athletes reinstated to the basketball team after the NCAA found them academically ineligible. BSOC also collected donations for various disaster relief efforts. In the winter and spring of 1969, black students, including BSOC members, introduced the idea of black studies. In the fall of 1969, black students were making public statements demanding administrative action on the black studies initiative.¹²

The idea of black studies also was adopted by faculty members in the education school who wanted to develop a department of inner-city studies, which would include black studies. Education faculty members also proposed a master’s degree in urban studies.

Black Protest at Harvard University

The story is remarkably similar at Harvard University. A black student club formed at Harvard and soon became a focal point for campus politics. Black students were concerned about a number of diverse issues, such as affirmative action and black studies. There was a building occupation, which created the opportunity for black studies to be introduced into the decision-making process at Harvard.

The Association for African and African American Students was founded in 1963. The group, which became known as “Harvard Afro,” wanted to “promote mutual understanding between African and African-American students, to provide ourselves a voice in the community . . . and to develop the leadership capable of effectively coping with the various problems of our peoples.”¹³ The group took a nationalist stance from its inception: its membership statement said that any African or African American at Harvard could join the group. Unsurprisingly, Harvard liberals opposed this, and the group was not recognized by Harvard until its charter was changed to say that membership would be by “invitation only.” Until the spring of 1968, the group functioned mainly as an academic and social club. One of its best-known activities was the publication of the Harvard Journal of Negro Affairs, in which students would write on African American topics.

Many factors contributed to Harvard Afro becoming a much more political
organization. Throughout the mid-1960s, students had more contact with the civil rights movement, which emboldened them. Students were not afraid to make unusual demands. For example, students demanded a “soul” table in one of Harvard’s cafeterias. Another factor that contributed to radicalization at Harvard was that the profile of black students was changing. In earlier years, black students had come from well-to-do African American families, but during the 1960s more black students were recruited from inner cities. This changing identity combined with the rise of cultural nationalism encouraged a more militant Harvard Afro.

As black student groups did at many other campuses, Harvard Afro asserted its prominence at a time when other groups challenged the university. Although Afro’s actions never reached the proportions of the Third World Strike, the group did participate in what was the most disruptive event in Harvard’s history: the clash between the Harvard chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and President Nathan N. Pusey. I do not describe the event in detail here; readers can consult Eichel, Jost, Luskin, and Neustadt’s *Harvard Strike* or Lipset and Riesman’s *Education and Politics at Harvard* for in-depth accounts. However, a few major points are worth noting. First, Vietnam War politics motivated the Harvard protests. Specifically, SDS and other students and professors wanted to prohibit military recruitment at the campus. This was a common point of contention at many campuses during the 1960s, and it is an issue that still resonates today. Second, the conflict between students and administrators escalated to a point where the SDS and other groups occupied buildings, resulting in a violent confrontation with the administration, who had called the police. Harvard Afro initially allied itself with the more radical students and forged ties with sympathetic administrators who listened to their demands. The Harvard Afro students also made a strategic move: they soon decoupled their demands from those of SDS and other groups. By doing so, they were able to continue discussions about black student issues, including “Afro-American” studies, which had been broached in April 1968, unaffected by the fight between Nathan Pusey and the Harvard SDS.

In the aftermath of the strike, a committee on African and African American studies was formed. The committee’s goal was to consider an “Afro-American studies major” and an Africa theme house. The committee was an ad hoc group within Harvard’s administrative structure. It would report to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and its recommendations would be fully debated at faculty senate meetings. As the year went on, the committee acquired more
power. When an entire academic department was proposed, the committee did the work necessary to recruit faculty and argue for the department in the academic senate. As at the other campuses, the Harvard strike allowed black students to become influential actors within the university. Although students were not part of the committee itself, they communicated frequently with the committee, and committee members reported to the faculty how students felt.

Community Education Fails

At first, the protest at many campuses was not about black studies. Rather, black student actions were about related issues such as housing, enrollments, and university-community relations. Once black issues were on the agenda, students and faculty members used the opportunity to promote black studies. Professors and administrators then had an important choice to make: what kind of black studies would be implemented? To answer this question, it is important to review the different options for institutionalizing black studies.

At the two Chicago campuses, individuals proposed two versions of black studies, which I call “community education” and “academic black studies.” Community education refers to black studies aimed at providing training for individuals who would teach or do social work in the African American community. Another goal for community education was educating African Americans and other urban minorities, rather than teaching whites about black history and culture. Community-education advocates frequently argued that black studies should have its own ideas and methodological tools. Other activists proposed that black studies should resemble existing academic disciplines. Academic black studies would be an example of an interdisciplinary field drawing from the existing social sciences and humanities. Rather than being oriented toward the black community, this new field would serve the entire university and would ideally offer courses taken by both black and white students.

“Community education” and “academic black studies” are not mutually exclusive alternatives. Most of those I label as proponents of academic black studies cared a great deal about urban communities and black students’ self-image. My argument is that students, professors, and administrators had quite different ideas about black studies’ priorities. Ignoring these distinctions impedes an understanding of how black studies was implemented in different universities. A student or professor who approaches black studies as a service to the African American community will make different arguments than one
who believes that black studies is another interdisciplinary enterprise indistinguishable from China studies or African studies.

The key issue is how university decision makers interpreted proposals for community education and academic black studies. The events I discuss in this section should not be surprising; deans rejected the community-education approach because it was incompatible with the ideals of elite education and academic autonomy. Making the success of black studies dependent on an ideology that conflicted with the university’s institutional culture suggests that black studies proponents were not sufficiently attuned to their bureaucratic environment. This section focuses on the two Chicago universities because, surprisingly, community education was not proposed at Harvard.

**Community Education in Hyde Park**

At the University of Chicago, administrators repeatedly rejected any form of black studies that had community service as the main objective. One administrator explicitly said that the goal of the University of Chicago was elite education, and any new academic program would have to be compatible with that goal. Not only was community education summarily rejected, its proponents at the University of Chicago were unable to agree on a direction for black studies. The community-education approach for black studies might have been valuable as a diagnostic for black problems, but it failed as an appeal to administrators within the university and as a rallying point for black studies advocates.

The spring 1968 black student sit-in at the University of Chicago led to the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee on African and African American Studies in the Curriculum. It was during meetings of this committee that community education’s failure was most apparent. The first public demands for black studies were made at a meeting on May 8, 1968.¹⁵ The committee’s most public action was a meeting held at the Center for Continuing Education on June 5, 1968, and funded by the university.¹⁶ The goal of the meeting was not clearly defined, but faculty members were pressured to have a forum where interested parties would be invited to discuss the demands for change at the university. It was at this meeting that faculty members, administrators, students, and black elites argued over the meaning of black studies. Some administrators saw the meeting as an opportunity to formulate a program for black studies consistent with Chicago’s mission as an elite university, while others saw it as an opportunity to make the university more responsive to black concerns. Ultimately, this meeting failed to produce a coherent framework for black studies. Black
studies’ advocates were unable to set the agenda and mobilize support within the organization.

James Bruce, an assistant professor at the university and the committee chair, selected a number of highly influential black intellectuals to attend the meeting and determine what would be done at the university. Invited participants were drawn from Chicago’s black cultural and intellectual elite. Attendees included Lerone Bennett, then editor of *Ebony* magazine and prominent historian; Jeff Donaldson, a member of the avant-garde art collective Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists; Gerald McWhorter, a Chicago-trained sociologist who later changed his name to Abdul Alkalimat; Hoyt Fuller, editor of *Negro Digest*; and LeRoi Jones, who would later take the name Amiri Baraka and become one of the best-known radical black poets of the post–civil rights era.

The meeting was tense, and there was little agreement on exactly what should be done at the University of Chicago. James Bruce started the meeting by referring to a statement circulated beforehand, which described studies in the “African and Black American Humanities.” Central to this idea was a theme common in the black power movement that there is a distinct “black experience” and that educational institutions should accommodate it. Specifically, Bruce wanted the committee to consider possible programs that might address the black experience. Lerone Bennett affirmed that this was important because educational institutions had completely excluded the black experience. Conversation soon turned to the topic of what currently existed in the curriculum at the University of Chicago, and meeting participants quickly argued that the present curriculum focused on Africa and ignored African American culture. Current analyses of African and African American culture reflected European values, which were inaccurate.¹⁷

During the discussion of existing course offerings and their merits, LeRoi Jones shifted the issue to exactly what the meeting was supposed to produce, which Bruce did not clearly explain. He simply said that he wanted the university to change. In response, Jones reframed the issue as one of black-oriented education. The university should allow blacks—specifically, Chicago-area blacks—to control whatever new program it created.¹⁸ The University of Chicago should also support existing black organizations, which moved universities away from pursuing programs with European biases. Black-controlled and university-supported education would improve not only the university and the organizations that it sponsored but the entire black community as well, putting the responsibility for black education in black hands.
A series of strong disagreements followed. A student argued that there was no way the university could teach her anything about black culture, prompting a more extensive exchange about who could teach black culture. Some participants drew attention to the meeting’s context. One person implied that the university was engaged in a reactionary tactic, designed to prevent “another Columbia.” Curtis Ellis, local literary personality and bookstore owner, implied that the meeting and discussion of curricular reform was yet another example of the mishandling of the relationship between the University of Chicago and the Hyde Park community. Afterward, Jones seized on Ellis’s comments to point out that since it was mainly the white faculty who were interested in reforming the curriculum, primarily for the benefit of the mostly white student body, they were missing the point, which was that educational reform should be for and controlled by the black community. Black education was about having the power to create ways of life that reflected black values.

When the topic eventually came around to the specifics of a new curriculum or program, the disagreements continued. Gerald McWhorter raised the issue that blacks and whites might not agree that there was a well-defined body of knowledge to be transmitted in a black studies curriculum and that public meetings such as this one had little impact, because it was administrators who would make the ultimate decision on whether to create a new program. Because of that, many black students at other universities had felt the need to create independent institutes. Faculty members present then discussed how the university could sponsor some sort of organization that could reach out to the community, and there was subsequent argument over exactly who might manage these new institutions. Dispute arose over whether institutions targeted at blacks contradicted the goals of the university. Eventually, university dean Wayne Booth noted that the creation of such institutions was more than the committee could do, and other participants agreed. Throughout the meeting, a student constantly reminded Booth and Meyer that black students had never demanded change and that she believed the university was incapable of teaching her about black culture. The meeting ended inconclusively; there were repetitions of the idea that the locus of educational reform should be in the black community, an idea not accepted by the faculty members present.

This June 1968 meeting was ostensibly called to provide a stable framework for curricular change within the University of Chicago. The meeting’s inconclusive end prevented the establishment of a clear set of ideas that the committee could embrace and make the basis of future reform. The only kinds of
reform that participants would endorse—the creation of institutes and programs for the black community—were incompatible with the goal of the university: the education of its elite student body.

The meeting’s outcome shows the importance of political skill. Black studies advocates at Chicago formulated demands that contradicted the culture of the University of Chicago. When an opportunity arose to define an agenda and build a coalition, nobody was able to interpret the interests of the university administration and black activists in a way that would lead to a consensus and a new curriculum. The prestige of African American intellectuals and business leaders was not sufficient to force the creation of a new agenda. The crucial step from grievance to agenda setting was never taken.

Community Education Almost Makes It at the University of Illinois

Community education’s fate at the University of Illinois was subtler. It did not fail immediately; instead, it experienced initial success. Community education’s eventual failure at the Illinois campus had to do with poor bureaucratic maneuvering. Community-education advocates incorrectly assessed to what degree the administration accepted their framing of the need for black studies. Faculty members proposed a master’s degree in urban education, which was approved by the faculty senate. The undoing of the proposal had to do with the revision of the master’s degree program, when faculty members insisted that the degree program be supervised by “community members.” By proposing external control of a university program, community education’s advocates exceeded the boundaries of what was acceptable in a research university and triggered conflict that ended the proposal. At Illinois, advocates of ethnic and black studies bungled the initial community-education proposal by extending it too far.

The first push for community education began in the spring of 1969, when students and faculty members at the University of Illinois discussed the need for “ethnic studies.” A proposal for a College of Ethnic Studies was offered in April 1969, but the idea of an entire college was never developed.²³ By October 1969, an Ethnic Studies Committee was formed and regularly convened. A draft of one proposal, along with other documents, indicates that the university administration was quickly trying to create some kind of program.²⁴ The university’s long-range planning document of 1969 states that ethnic studies should be developed.²⁵ The push for ethnic studies culminated in a proposal for a master’s degree in urban education, to be offered by the College of Edu-
cation. The degree program would encompass both ethnic studies and teacher education.

The master’s degree in urban education never came to fruition, although there was a great deal of agreement concerning the need for ethnic studies. At first, ethnic studies advocates were strategic in their approach. Proponents tried to cultivate a wide-ranging constituency. The ethnic studies program, in whatever form, would include black studies. A draft of one proposal stated that black studies would be an integral or “initial” part of the program. From the beginning, the Ethnic Studies Committee included the student-oriented Black Studies Formulating Committee.²⁶

The Ethnic Studies Committee also tried to include other ethnic groups, and it is here that the most controversial aspect of the proposal started to emerge. George Giles, a professor of education, wrote a memo to the Ethnic Studies Committee chair emphasizing that ethnic studies was not a euphemism for “black studies.” He also suggested that the program’s content be adjusted to the ethnic group’s position in American society. He wrote that some ethnic groups were in a militant phase, which meant that it might be “necessary and desirable to institute Black control, an all-Black faculty, and a ‘generally revolutionary’ orientation.”²⁷

The turning point was when the master’s degree proposal was brought to the faculty senate in December 1970. When the meeting moved to the master of arts in urban education proposal, the debate was lively. Education college dean Van Cleve Morris discussed how the committee worked with numerous other departments. Harriet Talmadge, another education professor, defended the proposal by saying that it encompassed many ethnic groups. She noted that professors in other departments, such as Spanish, had been consulted. In passing, she also said that Chicago parents had contacted faculty members working on the proposal. The parents of minority children in Chicago, Talmadge said, wanted the university to provide teachers for their children.²⁸

Other faculty members criticized the proposal. R. V. Harnack described the program as outdated: the model of race relations inherent in the proposal was not appropriate. Nicholas Moravecevich attacked the emphasis on teaching Chicago’s minority children and the omission of Chicago’s largest ethnic group, the Polish. Professor Wyer then repeated that the proposal had community approval, which was followed by a vote to not defer the approval vote to a later meeting. After a nondeferral vote, Harnack announced that the Speech and Theatre Department withdrew its support, and if the senate approved the
proposal as it was, the Educational Assistance Program would withdraw its support.²⁹

Grace Holt, a member of the Speech and Theatre Department and future chair of the Illinois-Chicago Black Studies Department, expressed her reservations about the proposal. She refrained from stating all her concerns in detail, but she thought the proposal was poorly designed and said there was a breakdown of communication between the Ethnic Studies Committee and the Department of Speech and Theatre. After a response by Talmadge, the presiding officer of the meeting called a vote for approval of the master’s in urban education programs, which was carried.³⁰

The awkward handling of the proposal during the meeting and the demand for community-oriented education foreshadowed the proposal’s ultimate failure. By the fall of 1970, the dean of the College of Education had alienated many minority faculty members, who by then opposed the proposal. These critical faculty members introduced a revised proposal for the master’s degree. The major difference between the new and old proposals was an emphasis on Chicago’s urban minorities, as opposed to ethnic groups more generally, and a new administrative structure designed to manage community-oriented activities.

A November 15, 1970, memorandum to education dean Van Cleve Morris from Professors Brown, Coleman, D’Amare, Martin, Valcarecel, and Wells explained this new justification for a master’s in urban education: “It is generally recognized that urban education is synonymous with racial minority group education, as urban centers are increasingly becoming predominated by minority groups. Therefore, it is imperative that we offer immediately to our interested students the opportunity to develop an expertise in inner-city education which emphasizes the educational needs of the Black, Latin American and Indian communities.” The Division of Inner-City Studies was a concept based not on ethnicity but on the urban context and its place in the larger economic system. In a footnote, the authors stated: “It is significant to note that a definition of ‘Blackness’ which is not necessarily based on the color of one’s skin, but on one’s relationship to the imperialist system.” Because of the emphasis on the educational needs of entire communities, the division was designed with a broad mandate to “deal directly with the education, politics, economics, technology and cultural arts of inner city communities.”³¹

The division would offer a wide range of services: not only training for teachers and administrators, but also education in the history of the arts and spon-
sorship of programs reaching out to various ethnic communities in Chicago. The administrative unit encompassing these activities would be called the Division of Inner-City Studies. The division would offer courses in black art, cultural dynamics of the Latins, and social history of Latin America for teachers. Each program would be supervised by a board of directors, one representing the black, one the Latino, and one the Native American community in Chicago.

Disputes over the proposed Division of Inner-City Studies erupted at a January 1971 faculty workshop held for the purpose of further developing the master’s program proposal. The workshop broke into smaller groups, focusing on particular aspects of the proposal. Minority faculty members were not allowed to participate in these smaller meetings, which heightened tensions. Sessions were visited by critics insisting that the proposal had been developed without their input. In a plenary session held about halfway through the day, critics insisted again that the proposal was developed without the input of minority faculty members. Critics soon demanded that the proposal be dropped and rewritten tabula rasa. A motion was introduced to have the College of Education’s Graduate Advisory Committee and Graduate Office reconstituted to “involve community representation at a decision, policy making level.” This motion was approved.³²

The master’s in urban education program was discussed again. A motion was introduced to establish a “board of community and faculty representatives to develop policy for a new program in Urban Education.” This proposal was passed; visitors from the Chicago public school system approved the vote; and then some unnamed participants asked the dean to commit to establishing this policy-making board. The dean hesitated, which, according to one observer, was viewed as inadequate because “it has become common knowledge the Dean and his faculty have been urged to develop a similar board,” presumably a reference to the Division of Inner-City Studies proposal from two months before. A heated debate ensued, which ended when the dean and others walked out of the workshop.³³

The dean’s unwillingness to adopt the community-based oversight mechanism for ethnic studies killed the proposal. A week after the acrimonious workshop, Dean Van Cleve Morris wrote a memorandum to all College of Education faculty and students saying that he was withdrawing the master’s of urban education proposal. He called the external supervision of university business unacceptable, although he admitted that the university could be more open to
input from outsiders. In response to this criticism, he organized a committee to consider institutionalizing existing community-university relations. There was no other ethnic studies proposal.

As at Chicago, a lack of social skill undermined black studies at the Illinois campus. The ethnic studies proposal, which included black studies, was acceptable in some form. Community education might have had a future, but advocates overestimated its acceptance by the administration. Advocates did not understand the correct combination of elements that would help community education survive the university decision-making process. The Illinois administration, as demonstrated by the dean of the College of Education and the earlier faculty senate meeting, would accept some aspects of community education, such as its insistence that coursework would help students work in Chicago schools. However, administrators would reject other aspects of community education, such as external governance of an academic program. Black studies and ethnic studies advocates did not understand that academic governance was a strong norm, the violation of which would sink their proposal. This misperception of what was acceptable in a mainstream academic organization was crucial in the collapse of the coalition behind ethnic studies.

The Stability and Instability of Academic Black Studies

Community education failed at both campuses because it was incompatible with the organizational culture of both universities. At the University of Chicago, administrators rejected any concept of black studies not consistent with its mission as an elite university. University of Illinois administrators were more sympathetic, but they could not accept external community control over academic activities. Despite these setbacks, black studies was institutionalized at both campuses. At the University of Illinois, students working independently of the Ethnic Studies Committee developed a proposal for a Department of Black Studies. The proposal was eventually approved. At the University of Chicago, a Committee for African and African American Studies in the Humanities was established to recruit faculty, coordinate courses, and eventually move toward the creation of some sort of institute or academic program.

The move from community education to academic black studies highlights the combination of framing and strategic actions, that is, social skill, in the creation of durable movement outcomes. New proposals formulated black studies as an extension of existing curricula. The point of reference was the acad-
emy, not the outside community. This new framework was not criticized when black studies was approved by the University of Illinois administration, and it was openly criticized by only a single administrator at the University of Chicago.

The strategic actions of black studies advocates within their organizations ensured that receptiveness to black studies would lead to new institutions. Students and faculty at the University of Illinois demonstrated savvy in the steering of their proposal. For example, activists legitimated their proposal by having two external higher education consultants critique and revise it. At the University of Chicago, concerned administrators organized a black studies committee that would satisfy the demands for an Afro-American Studies Institute and avoid challenging the University of Chicago’s curriculum.

This section chronicles bureaucratic maneuvering at the Illinois and Chicago campuses. I also discuss the years after the founding of black studies programs, when the Illinois program’s growth slowed and the Chicago program nearly disappeared. My purpose is to show the different processes behind the survival of black studies programs and, more generally, social movement outcomes in organizations.

The basic lesson to be learned from the evolution of black studies in these two universities is that an organization’s rules have a large impact on movement outcomes. In both cases, the problems that black studies programs faced were never “solved,” yet one program survived while the other nearly disbanded and exists today in a highly attenuated form. The outcomes were quite different because black studies was institutionalized in different ways. At the University of Chicago, black studies existed as a program whose funding was not guaranteed, while at the University of Illinois, black studies’ status as a department protected many of its resources. These protections were crucial when interest in black studies declined in the 1970s and budgets were cut throughout higher education. In the end, only the department at the University of Illinois survived. My argument is simple: the long-term evolution of black studies within specific universities is as much a function of institutional rules as it is of activism and mobilization.

*Academic Black Studies Withers in Hyde Park*

The slow deinstitutionalization of black studies at the University of Chicago can be traced to the aftermath of the June 1968 meeting. Despite the failure of community education, there were still attempts at starting some sort of Afro-
American studies program within the Division of Humanities. James Bruce, chair of the Committee on African and African American Humanities, wrote a June 19, 1968, memorandum describing the need for an Institute of African American Studies and Culture, to be affiliated with the university. The institute’s goal would be to research black culture, sponsor African American writers and artists, and train humanities scholars and social scientists with an interest in the black community.

The response to this proposal and other calls for African American studies was mixed. Donald Levine, then a master of the college, circulated a memo responding to the criticism that the university did not address the African American community. Levine felt that the university should develop its curriculum according to what faculty thought would best develop students’ intellectual character, a goal inconsistent with promoting the cultural legacy of a particular ethnic group. He also thought that the critics were ignoring courses that already existed. Stuart Tave, a dean at the university, developed a position between Bruce’s and Levine’s. He wrote to Bruce that a black staff at such an institute would be inconsistent with a general orientation toward intellectual excellence. Furthermore, the creation of an institute would require many resources, and Bruce should be concerned about more immediate reform.

In the memo’s conclusion, Tave offered a proposal that would set the tone for black studies for decades at the University of Chicago. Tave wanted an institute to develop through a slow and meticulous identification of excellent talent, who might be brought to the campus for a lecture. An institute might be possible if it were a “natural” outgrowth of existing activities, and this would put Bruce and Tave in a position where they could talk with some authority about who was doing the best work on African American studies. This effort would be organized around a formal, permanent committee headed by James Bruce.

This committee had some early success. The funds allotted to it were to be used, in part, for inviting speakers who might later become candidates for positions at the university. In 1969, James Bruce managed to invite George Kent, a literary scholar, to give a talk at the university, with the understanding that Bruce and other faculty members might be interested in having Kent join the faculty. Kent’s visit turned out as expected. He was appointed to the Department of English in 1970 and assumed chairmanship of the Committee on African and Black American Humanities by 1971. In the early 1970s, the committee also organized a number of cultural events.

Aside from hiring Kent and sponsoring cultural events, the committee was
unable to expand. The underlying problem was an unstable and erratic budget. Each year, the budget was open to negotiation. Black studies’ status as a nondepartment required a yearly approval of the budget. This meant that every year brought opportunities for the budget to be slashed or increased, depending on the preferences of the dean and the state of the university budget. Because it was a nondepartment, there were no formal, enforced commitments for faculty salaries or other resources.

This problem was apparent from the very beginning. In 1968, the committee’s budget was designed to cover the chair’s salary as well as extra funds for instructors, lecturers, and cultural events. However, the chair’s salary exceeded the actual funds, and the committee’s activities were covered by an overdraft of $4,000. This sum became the baseline for future budgets until spring 1973. At that point, George Kent requested a smaller sum—$3,500—which was reduced to $2,500 by the end of the summer. Responding to Kent’s inquiry about the status of his budget request, administrators communicated with each other, saying that the Committee on African and African American Studies did not contribute much to the university but that some funding must be approved because the committee’s work was valued by students and the university community.³⁹

Kent tried to prevent the further erosion of the committee’s budget. He proposed in the fall of 1973 a reorganization of the committee so that its members would be drawn from a wide variety of departments, a move probably designed to build a pro–black studies coalition within the university.⁴⁰ The reorganization was approved—and survives to this day—but it did not have the intended effect. There was confusion and delay in reorganizing the committee.⁴¹ By the time the next round of budgeting arrived, in the early summer of 1974, the deans of the college and the Division of the Humanities each offered only $500. University deans knew that this budget would not solve the committee’s “long term problem.”⁴² Kent accepted the $1,000 budget for the committee’s activities. This $1,000 budget was approved until 1978, but a constant budget is a diminishing resource. By 1978, inflation had severely cut the purchasing power of the committee’s budget, and its problems were never resolved. As late as 1983, there was still confusion over which administrative unit would assume responsibility for the committee and its budget.⁴³

These constant budget problems took their toll. As early as 1973, administrators noted that the committee was unable to offer many courses.⁴⁴ By 1978, the budget was barely enough to fly more than one or two speakers to campus
per year and clearly not enough to pay for a series of cultural events. By the mid-1980s, the committee’s sole activity was organizing a semiannual lecture series. After Kent’s hiring, the committee was unable to acquire or maintain financial resources, much less move toward offering courses or developing an academic program or an African American Studies Institute, as envisioned by Stuart Tave and James Bruce in 1969.

In 1985, the push for African American studies was revived when the university issued a report on minority enrollment at the University of Chicago. The overall theme of the report was consistently low African American enrollments. The report recommended the organization of a degree-granting Committee on African and African American Studies, to be modeled on similar area studies and women’s studies committees in the university. My examination of convocation announcements and discussions with faculty members on the committee revealed that very few students obtained a bachelor’s degree in African American studies from that program. One Chicago professor with whom I spoke noted that most of those students focused on African studies. In some years, not a single student focused on African American studies, according to my study of graduation announcements. The situation at Chicago changed somewhat in the 1990s when the Center for Race, Culture, and Politics was created to coordinate teaching and research on racial issues at the University of Chicago. The center does not yet offer degrees; some of the members of the Committee on African and African American Studies participate in the center’s activities.

The lesson from the decline of African American studies at the University of Chicago is that being consistent with an organization’s culture is not enough to ensure the long-term survival of a movement outcome. Bureaucratic neglect and confusion can easily erode a policy or work unit. Given the weak institutional support given to African American studies, it is not surprising that later efforts to build new coalitions for African American studies met with limited success. Once an academic program declines, it likely loses legitimacy. An activity viewed as low status is unlikely to attract the support of skilled individuals. Without the constant pressure generated by a social movement, the outcome withers.

*Academic Limbo at Chicago Circle*

Black studies at the University of Illinois turned out differently. While the Ethnic Studies Committee at the university wrote the ill-fated proposal for the
master’s of urban education, a separate committee of black students and faculty worked on a black studies proposal. The strategy of the Committee on Black Studies was quite different from the Ethnic Studies Committee. Rather than emphasizing a community orientation, black studies was modeled on existing departments, and there is no indication that it would be staffed, managed, or advised by people outside the university. This strategy led to the creation of the Department of African American Studies.

From the beginning, black studies’ advocates skillfully navigated the university’s bureaucratic environment, solving problems and framing proposals in ways acceptable to administrators. For example, an early proposal for black studies suggested collecting existing courses together into a curriculum for the program, instead of proposing entirely new course offerings. There was some unusual wording in the proposal, such as the request to hire a “funky sociologist,” a “soulful” political scientist, and a university president who could “get down.” Aside from such rhetorical exuberance, for the most part, the black studies program was framed to be compatible with existing course offerings and degree programs.

Perhaps the savviest move on the part of black students was demanding that the administration hire a consultant to “translate the working model submitted by students into a viable black studies program that would be acceptable to the students, faculty, and the Administration.” Students probably knew that they did not possess the administrative skill to steer a proposal through various committees and perform other tasks such as hiring staff or budget writing. Donald H. Smith, an executive at the Urban Coalition who had been a professor, was selected after a brief negotiation among students, faculty members, and administrators. His visit went well, and he wrote the university vice chancellor of the need to continue working on black studies, with faculty and student participation. Students seem to have embraced the consultant’s criticisms and continued to support the black studies proposal.

The proposal brought to the faculty senate in April 1971 reflected the input of students, faculty members, and the consultant. The proposal described black studies as an interdisciplinary course of study, with required courses in history and the social sciences. The proposal also rejected the nationalist justification for black studies: “The main purpose of the proposed program, however, is neither the inculcation of a Black identity, nor the assertion of Black pride.” The program’s purpose was humanistic—the proper study of mankind is man. Unlike the master’s of urban education proposal, black studies was
approved without incident. The Illinois Board of Higher Education approved the black studies major the following year but rejected the teacher education component of the proposal because teacher education was being phased out at the Chicago campus.⁵²

From the beginning, the Department of Black Studies (initially called the Program in Black Studies before it offered a bachelor’s degree in 1973) faced difficulties. The department’s single professor and its lecturers often complained about the unit’s low reputation. Sterling Plumpp, a poet teaching literature in the department, wrote that black studies was not seen as a legitimate field of study within the university.⁵³ Other documents suggest that faculty members and students felt that black studies was not viewed as a valid academic endeavor and was in danger of failing to secure the resources needed to consistently offer its curriculum. In one memo, the chancellor himself wrote to a black student leader, firmly stating that any budget shortfall would be covered by the provost and that unexpected budget problems would not prevent the offering of black studies courses.⁵⁴

The program’s weak legitimacy was evident in arguments over its curriculum and in attempts to expand the curriculum. A proposal for a master’s degree in urban studies in 1974 was viewed by some faculty members as duplicating black studies courses. Professors in other departments sometimes made the same claim about black studies courses.⁵⁵ The department’s low status—with only one faculty member in the graduate college—was cited as a reason for its exclusion from discussions concerning a linguistics graduate program.⁵⁶ Similar reasons, such as lack of faculty in the graduate college and lack of funding, likely prevented the development of a graduate program in black studies, which was discussed by faculty in the mid-1970s.⁵⁷ Reviews of the department also focused on its low status.⁵⁸

While the department members successfully defended its curriculum by criticizing the urban studies proposal and by cross-listing courses, the black studies faculty could not solve other problems.⁵⁹ Attempts to develop black studies were stymied by financial and bureaucratic difficulties in the late 1970s and 1980s. Although Grace Holt, the department’s first director, was successful in recruiting some permanent lecturers and a handful of untenured faculty, she had great difficulty in recruiting senior faculty and promoting junior faculty. The department was constantly pursuing a person of “national stature” to lead and develop the program, but it never succeeded.⁶⁰

Part of the problem lay in bureaucratic delays. Although the dean of letters
and science approved numerous faculty searches, the approval often came in the late winter or summer. The department did not have the opportunity to recruit from the widest pool of candidates.\textsuperscript{61} When faculty searches were successful, there were often problems. For example, one scholar arrived at the department in the late 1970s and assumed heavy administrative obligations, which did not permit this person to complete a research agenda meriting promotion. Not surprisingly, this person left the department. In addition to the crushing administrative duties, the Illinois administration did not give the department the fiscal resources to develop a cohort of senior faculty, which contributed to the “low morale and anxiety on the parts of black studies faculty members and students.”\textsuperscript{62}

The difficulty in funding and developing a core black studies faculty was compounded by the attention given to students. Faculty members often reported they felt a special obligation to help black students that manifested itself in various ways. Such problems were raised numerous times by faculty members in internal department reports. The department sponsored cultural events such as jazz and gospel music concerts, black plays, and various symposia. The assistance given to black students often consumed a great deal of time for junior faculty. Internal department self-studies as well as external reviews noted that excessive time dedicated to students detracted from the department’s ability to promote junior faculty members.\textsuperscript{63}

Despite the attention given to students, the department could not prevent a declining enrollment. During the mid-1970s, enrollment in the major peaked at 19. Even though black enrollment in the entire university exceeded 3,200 in 1978 and regularly exceeded 2,000 throughout the 1980s, the department often enrolled only students in the major—less than 1 percent of the black student population. The introductory course in black studies had almost 150 students in the early 1970s but only half that number by the early 1980s. After an initial burst of enthusiasm following the black power era, the department could depend on only a small core of students. Furthermore, it was frequently observed that the department simply failed to attract nonblack students, calling into question the role of such a department in a College of Letters and Science dedicated to serving the entire university.\textsuperscript{64}

The Department of Black Studies faced a multitude of problems—poor funding, disputes over the program’s jurisdiction, dropping enrollments, and difficulties in faculty recruitment and promotion. The staff was able to solve some problems, but most went unsolved. For example, there was never a suc-
cessful push to increase enrollments; they simply picked up when black studies as a discipline experienced an upsurge in popularity in the 1990s. There was never a spurt of hiring indicating an administrative commitment to develop the program. Until the 1990s, there were never more than two tenured faculty members, and in many years, most of the teaching staff were nontenured assistant professors and lecturers.

The Department of Black Studies survived because it was a department. Similar events would have easily led to the disbanding of an academic unit institutionalized as a program or committee because such programs do not have priority in acquiring resources, such as faculty salaries and office space. A change in the administration could easily mean that a unit’s budget was reduced or that hiring of personnel became a low priority for administrators, as shown by the University of Chicago case. Because black studies at the University of Illinois had departmental status, it was automatically allocated about four full-time employees per year and had some claim over discretionary funds. Without departmental status, the program’s persistent problems might well have resulted in complete deinstitutionalization.

Birth, Death, and Rebirth at Harvard

Black studies has a more complex history at Harvard University. Rather than being a story of institutional failure or stasis, black studies went through three different phases, emerging in the end as one of the most dynamic and influential programs in the field. Like most black studies programs, there was an initial struggle and triumph, when black students and sympathizers within the university managed to get Harvard’s faculty senate to approve the department. In this early stage, there was much excitement about what a black studies department could be and the role it could play within an elite research university. By 1972, a different atmosphere prevailed in the program. The department chair, Ewart Guinier, had difficulties managing the program. Enrollments were dropping; student interest flagged; and faculty members felt embattled. By the late 1970s, the department was decimated. Guinier had left the program; junior faculty members were not promoted; and the number of senior faculty members and students dropped nearly to zero. Resources for the program were nonexistent. In the 1970s, the department chairwoman, musicologist Eileen J. Southern, had to install the department’s carpet, air conditioning, and storm windows herself.65 Southern resigned the chair position after the university administra-
tion seemed to usurp her authority by establishing a committee to run the department while she was on a leave of absence. Nathan Huggins, chair in the 1980s, did manage to hire two senior scholars. After Huggins’s death from pancreatic cancer in 1990, the department had only a single professor (the German scholar of African American literature Werner Sollors) and a handful of undergraduate majors. As at Chicago, black studies was on the path to elimination.

But remarkably, black studies at Harvard emerged in the late 1990s as a vibrant and completely rejuvenated department. Starting in 1991, Henry Louis Gates Jr. assumed the position of department chair and full professor of English literature. Already recognized and praised for his analysis of tropes in African American culture, Gates had ample experience as an editor, academic administrator, and intellectual entrepreneur. By the year 2000, Gates had managed to convert the Harvard program from a small, underdeveloped department to a widely recognized center for teaching and research. Among his many accomplishments are the recruitment of “star” faculty, increased enrollments, and international visibility for Harvard’s black studies unit.

Black studies’ rebirth at Harvard raises important questions: What was so remarkable about this program? What strategies did Gates employ to help him renovate the program? In the late 1980s, Harvard’s Department of African and African American Studies looked like many others. It was a small, poorly funded unit that few students or professors found worthwhile, a program that might have been easily eliminated were it not for its symbolism within the university. Even now, the program attracts criticism, and conflicts have led to the departure of some of its well-known professors. Still, the department has entered a period of renewed visibility. It now offers doctoral degrees, and the affiliated DuBois Institute hosts a wide range of highly visible research projects, including the Encyclopedia Africana, a reference tome that has become a popular reference for African and African American culture. How did this happen?

The Harvard department resembled black studies programs at many other universities. Black studies was introduced at a time of crisis in the university, when students occupied the administration building and challenged professors over a wide range of issues. The administration’s main response to black student activism was a Committee on African and African American Studies, which was supported by the Harvard-Radcliffe Policy Committee. The committee was established in April 1968 and was dedicated to exploring the possibility of Afro-American studies courses and an Afro-American studies major. This move was praised by many in the university, including the Harvard-
Radcliffe Policy Committee. In a letter to Franklin L. Ford, then a Harvard dean, and Harvard’s Committee on Educational Policy, the Policy Committee wrote, in a joint statement, that the new committee could start addressing the “current curricular failing.” For example, the Policy Committee pointed to Harvard students registering for African studies courses at MIT, which the committee interpreted as a “compensation” for a lack of courses at the Harvard campus. The Policy Committee viewed this as an opportunity to establish a proto–black studies curriculum. Courses that Harvard students attended at MIT should be listed in the Harvard course catalog. They also recommended that tutors or adjunct faculty be hired to teach African and African American materials.

Around the same time, other professors were making the first moves toward a fully operational department. The first meeting of the African and African American Studies Committee was held on May 21, 1968. At that meeting, the committee approved cross-listing courses at MIT and Boston University. One professor suggested a specialized track within the social relations major. There was a discussion on whether there should be some sort of African studies that concentrated on West Africa and the American black experience. The meeting minutes stress that the committee reached no consensus on this point, which allowed for debate to continue at later meetings.

In the fall of 1968, the African and African American Studies Committee met to discuss recent developments. For example, there was a stronger effort to find funds for black graduate students and other minorities. Committee members agreed that fellowships and scholarship opportunities should be extended to as many minorities as possible. A subcommittee on African American studies reported that they had called a number of other professors to understand how a student could piece together black studies from existing courses. Octavia Hudson, a student observer, said it was important that black students in all majors feel that black studies was not ignored.

The African and African American Studies Committee soon reached the point where they could seriously discuss an entire Department of African American Studies. The initial proposals to cross-list courses and look for additional staff were soon followed by suggestions for a self-contained academic program. The African American Studies Subcommittee presented an initial report in fall 1968. The subcommittee, which included future law professor Lani Guinier, argued that it was not enough to incorporate black experiences into the curriculum. Instead, what was needed was a distinct academic unit. The
fall 1968 report requested that the full committee endorse a proposal that asked the Harvard administration for a new degree program. This degree program would have two professors, including a chair who would coordinate the teaching of ten other affiliated faculty members. It would open in the fall of 1969.

The proposal for a department was approved and brought to Harvard’s central decision-making body, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), in winter 1969. By this time, many black students felt quite strongly that black studies was a nonnegotiable demand. According to a paper written by the Ad Hoc Committee of Black Students at Harvard and Radcliffe, “Any attempt to justify and explain an African-American major is irrelevant and unnecessary. There must be a major.”

The meeting of the FAS, in the words of the Ad Hoc Committee, would be the “culmination of negotiations” between the Harvard administration and black students.

The FAS convened on February 11, 1969, with 164 members present. The meeting was well attended, considering that faculty senate meetings are poorly attended at many universities, even Harvard. After resolving a few other issues, the meeting turned to the report of the African and African American Studies Committee. The document was known within Harvard as the Rosovsky report, after the committee chair Henry Rosovsky, economist and dean. Overall, the discussion was positive. Most speakers expressed approval of the Rosovsky report and its recommendations. But there were substantial points of disagreement. For example, there was some debate over whether African studies, which some speakers referred to as “regional studies,” should be bundled with African American studies. More important, A. M. Pappenheimer expressed concern over the report’s focus on black instructors. He stated that he was opposed to any language that implied that tutors for black students should be black. The minutes report the following:

Certainly we would all agree that there are many reasons for attempting vigorously to recruit and attract first rate black graduate students to Harvard and for increasing the number of black advisors, tutors and proctors. What he most emphatically disagreed with, Professor Pappenheimer said, was the implication that we should have black tutors, advisors and proctors in order that they might advise and tutor African-American students. One might equally recommend that we appoint Italo-Americans or Irish-Americans to take care of the needs of Americans of Italian descent or of Irish descent.
On similar grounds, Pappenheimer disapproved of the proposed African cultural center. In response, black students who had been invited to participate in the meeting argued that the cultural center did not promote segregation within the university. Like students at other colleges, they saw the center as an opportunity to combat social isolation on campus. After the students’ statement, Rosovsky defended graduate fellowships targeted at black students. He noted that only twenty out of thirty-two hundred graduate students in the entire university were black. There were other points of contention, especially sections in the Rosovsky report that made a place for student participation on the proposed faculty search committee. Eventually, the proposal was approved intact with the provisions for the cultural center and for student input on faculty searches. Motions to substantially alter the proposal failed.

The next few months would be crucial for Harvard black studies because the university would hire the department chair, who is responsible for managing the department’s daily activities and building the department’s reputation not just at Harvard, but within all of academia. The stakes were high. A successful chair could steer the department through tough budget fights and deflect criticisms that black studies was illegitimate. In the most optimistic scenario, the Department of African and African American Studies would become an integral part of America’s most prestigious research institution. But an unsuccessful chair would encourage the worst perceptions about black studies. Skeptics could point to a flailing program as evidence that black studies was nothing but politics dressed in academic garb.

The search for the chair commenced in the spring of 1969. The chair would assume his or her position in the fall of 1969 and begin to search for faculty who would teach and pursue research agendas. The committee first considered a number of African American men with strong research reputations, such as anthropologist St. Clair Drake, historian John Hope Franklin, and psychologist Kenneth Clarke. But by the summer of 1969 it was clear that it would be impossible to recruit any of these candidates. The Committee on African and African American Studies settled on Ewart Guinier. Guinier was African American, a prominent labor activist, and a Harvard undergraduate. He was also the father of Lani Guinier, who was at the time a Harvard undergraduate, black studies advocate, and future legal scholar. The reasons for offering Guinier the position are complex, but Harvard administrators believed he could be an effective administrator and relate well to the students, who were the program’s most important constituency. Guinier’s strength would not be in establishing the
program’s research reputation, but he could teach a few classes and manage the program. He was offered a professorship because the committee thought he would decline a lectureship.⁷⁷

Guinier accepted the department chair position. For the first year or so, he spent much of his time doing what most administrators do: He taught a few courses. He hired lecturers and planned the curriculum. He met with students and began to search for scholars who could be hired at both the junior and senior levels. The department also recruited the program’s first majors, who would graduate in 1974. Many of the components of a typical academic program were in place.

Although the department was operational by the early 1970s, Guinier’s tenure did not go smoothly. The Department of African and African American Studies suffered from the same problems that plagued black studies at other campuses. For example, student interest declined by the mid-1970s. Multiple reviews pointed out that black students were interested in taking the occasional African American studies course, but few were willing to concentrate in the field and earn a degree.⁷⁸ Enrollment figures from the mid-1970s show that the department graduated only a few majors per year and that introductory class enrollments hovered around twenty to thirty, a small pool from which to recruit future majors.⁷⁹

There were also administrative problems. Guinier was not able to hire senior scholars. Some junior-level scholars left because they were not promoted.⁸⁰ The lack of tenured senior scholars would lead to problems in the late 1970s and 1980s. Without tenured senior faculty, the department would have to depend exclusively on faculty members in other programs. The document establishing the governance of the department stated that an independent executive committee would determine policy until the department had two tenured faculty members. In other words, if there were no tenured faculty, the department literally could not govern itself. It would have to depend exclusively on its executive committee, which could be staffed by faculty members who might have only a passing interest in the department’s affairs. In the worst case, the executive committee could be hostile and uncooperative. This came to pass when the faculty of arts and sciences assumed control of tenured hires in 1973 through a new committee, leaving more mundane tasks to the chair and the staff.⁸¹

The governance of the department had degenerated by the late 1970s. The first sign of the department’s decline was a lukewarm department evaluation in 1972.⁸² The report commented on some positive aspects of the department,
such as the hiring of lecturers, but found that student interest was declining. Tensions between Guinier and the rest of the university came to a head during the 1972–1973 academic year, when government professor Martin Kilson published a series of articles in Harvard periodicals, also reprinted in the *New York Times*, in which he strongly criticized the Department of African and African American Studies. Among other things, Kilson thought that the department was plagued by administrative and academic problems. The government professor described the department harshly: “It has been, in short, an all-black enclave (or 99% so) defined by its Negro staff and militant Negro students in culturally xenophobic terms, within a predominantly white institution.” The department’s governing committee had a student observer, which Kilson said violated academic standards. In his own words, there was no way that a student could exercise academic authority. Kilson also thought that the department’s offerings were substandard and looked bad to outsiders. Guinier responded to Kilson’s accusations in a series of articles in which he defended the department’s course offerings and its commitment to serving students. The dispute required Guinier to devote much of his time to defending the department in the press and within the university.

Although Guinier continued to work at Harvard for a few more years, the department’s situation did not improve. Enrollments continued to decline, and morale suffered. Relations with other professors and administrators remained strained at best. The department did attract a small cohort of committed students, but it consisted mainly of Guinier, a handful of lecturers, and senior scholars from other departments with courtesy appointments. Guinier resigned from teaching at Harvard in spring 1974.

The department fared poorly in the years from 1974 to 1991. It was chaired by a number of scholars, none of whom could do much for the department. There were conflicts over governance and resources. The department chairs in this era could do little more than supervise lecturers and manage a dwindling group of majors; they could not focus on expanding the program. Student interest waned so much that at one point in the 1980s, only a single student majored in African American studies. Each chair had the unenviable task of renovating the department, which required hiring an entirely new staff, fighting for office space, and rehabilitating the major in the eyes of undergraduates. Any chair had to defend African American studies before skeptical deans and professors, a challenging task at any university. In an interview, Henry Rosovsky noted that the chair needed to be an “institution builder.” Unfortunately,
this kind of person would not be found for years. The department’s downward spiral emboldened its critics and made it an undesirable home for aspiring academics.

Things changed in 1991 when Harvard University appointed Henry Louis Gates Jr. to head the department. Already well known as one of the preeminent scholars of African American literature, Gates was also known as a keen academic impresario. He had edited Transition, a respected and highly visible journal of African and African American arts and political commentary. He helped Duke University’s Department of English rise to the top of its field when it had been a decent, but unremarkable, program. He also edited a number of texts and anthologies that redefined the study of American literature in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to editing journals, he had been the director of undergraduate studies at Yale’s English Department; served on various commissions that oversaw libraries, such as Harlem’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; and participated extensively in the committees supervising the Modern Language Association. Although commentators saw his hiring as another example of an academic star moving to Cambridge, the move was much more. It was the strategic hire of a person with a sterling academic reputation and optimal administrative skills.

Henry Rosovsky, chair of the 1968 Committee on African and African American Studies, and university president Derek C. Bok orchestrated Gates’s hire. Both nearing retirement, Rosovsky and Bok decided to make one last effort to rehabilitate the department. The strategy, they decided, required the administration to recruit an academic whose scholarly accomplishments would be first rate. This scholar would also be able to work within Harvard’s highly competitive bureaucratic environment.

The move was not problem free. Rosovsky and others worked diligently to persuade Gates to leave his position at Duke University and join the Harvard faculty. Gates knew that Harvard had its own internal culture. An outsider who came to renovate a department would have serious problems if he did not have crucial allies in other programs and within the administration. In a 1995 article, Gates relays his concerns: “I knew all these intelligent people preceded me as chairman and they failed. There had to be something institutional and structural here; it couldn’t be in their individual reasons.” Gates suggested Rosovsky teach him how to navigate the Harvard bureaucracy. Rosovsky agreed and invited him to make weekly visits to the campus for more than a year so he could speak with professors and administrators. Henry Rosovsky reports:
“He [Gates] came up from Duke every few weeks, and he and I would sit down and sort of plan the future of the department. He didn’t know Harvard. He had never been an administrator, so we had a joint seminar on what needed to be done in the institutional context, and all of that paid off.” Rosovsky’s memories were not totally correct. Gates had substantial administrative experience, although he was never specifically a department chair. These private planning sessions were enough to help Gates learn about the university. Confident that he could garner the support of enough key insiders, Gates accepted the position and assumed the chairmanship in fall 1991.

The first problem that Gates solved was the lack of committed faculty within the department. Instead of depending on professors with allegiances outside the department, Gates hired an entirely new cohort of senior faculty members who were recognized as the best in their fields, using the challenge of building a program as a lure. He quickly obtained permission to hire full professors who would not only attract positive attention for their research but also solve the department’s governance problems. New senior faculty, even if they had appointments in other programs, would be allied with Gates. They would be dedicated to teaching within the program and would do administrative work. The senior faculty would also shift power. With at least two tenured, full-time senior scholars, the department did not require oversight from an executive committee. It could function as a fully independent academic unit.

Harvard budgeting rules also greatly helped Gates and sympathetic administrators like Henry Rosovsky rebuild the program through joint hires. Unlike at many universities, a professor who holds a joint appointment at Harvard does not have to draw salaries from two programs. The dean, not the department chairs, determines where a professor’s salary comes from. It is possible for the salary to be associated exclusively with one department, even if the person works in two units. In those cases, a professor with a joint appointment might be paid from one department’s budget, and he or she would request the right to vote, supervise students, and teach courses in a second department. Therefore, the costs of making a joint hire are much lower. If the African and African American Studies Department offered a person a job, then a second department would simply review the candidate’s scholarly record, without worrying about the consequences for their own budget. Similarly, if a prominent scholar of African American issues managed to obtain an appointment in another program, Gates could easily offer him or her a reciprocal appointment in the African and African American studies unit at no extra cost.
With the support of the administration and rules that made hiring senior faculty easier than it otherwise might be, Gates hired a wide range of scholars during his fifteen years as chair. He reconnected the department with senior scholars in other departments who had grown distant. He hired philosopher Kwame Antony Appiah, sociologist and poverty expert William Julius Wilson, and religion scholar Cornel West. In later years, Gates hired junior scholars in the humanities. Overall, Gates’s recruitment efforts were an unparalleled success. Within a few years, the department grew from an underfunded, flailing program to one that regularly made headlines in the New York Times as the black studies “dream team.”

Aside from strategic hires, Gates showed an uncanny ability to build the department as an institution, a less commented-upon aspect of his tenure. Perhaps his most important move was to persuade donors to establish independent revenue sources for the department, such as grants, gifts, and income from projects associated with the department or the DuBois Institute. For example, Time Warner endowed the Quincy Jones Professorship of African American Music. This allowed the Harvard department to avoid the problems faced by other departments when they suffered from administrator turnover. A dean or provost might be sympathetic to black studies, but his or her successor might be hostile or have other more important problems to deal with. Organizational sociologists call this “turbulence”: unexpected events outside the Department of Black Studies could undermine the program. Income from sources other than the FAS would provide some protection for the program, help Gates fund scholarly activities, and help him hold his position in the face of hostile administrators and critics.

In addition to addressing financial issues, Gates expanded the department’s appeal by restructuring the degree program. The department created tracks allowing students to concentrate in either African or African American studies. Gates also did this to encourage Africanist and African Americanist scholars to use the same resources and interact with each other. The creation of multiple degree tracks expanded the department’s constituency within Harvard without magnifying conflicts between competing scholarly communities. In organizational terms, the multiple tracks made the department into a “shell” housing two highly visible, but loosely coupled, work groups, a situation that helped the department improve its reputation.

Gates was also well known for promoting research activities such as the Encyclopedia Africana, a desktop reference on Africa and the African diaspora.
The book has become an academic best seller, and Microsoft publishes an electronic version for classroom use. Gates also helped to redevelop the DuBois Institute. Conceived in 1968 along with the department, the institute would become a closely related research organization. The DuBois Institute atrophied for a time but experienced growth in the 1990s. It now organizes conferences, postdoctoral fellowships, and other research activities.

The lesson that can be learned from the resuscitation of Harvard’s department is that black studies lives and dies on the quality of its faculty. Although there is still hostility toward the program, as indicated by recent conflicts between President Larry Summers and various professors (see chapter 1, n. 6, for a discussion of these disputes), entrepreneurial chairs, like Gates, can find ways to make the best of the situation. The strategies that Gates employed to revive his program reflect experience cultivated from working at elite intellectual institutions for an extended period of time.

This lesson may sound like a truism, but it is not. As students of management and leadership know, the ability to act within a bureaucracy is a scarce commodity. Effective leadership depends on people’s ability to understand their social world, know the limits of their actions, and use personal connections to create and exploit opportunities. Ewart Guinier, although respected as a Harvard undergraduate and for his work within the labor movement, was a neophyte within the world of elite academia. He spent most of his career working on behalf of labor unions, which is an environment quite different from a research university. He probably did not possess the appropriate academic social skills to guide a controversial academic program during its formative years. Guinier’s intellect and Harvard experience made it possible for him to become chair, but his lack of experience with elite academic institutions probably put him at an unusual disadvantage in fights with administrators and other professors. Guinier did not have the experience that would let him advise junior faculty on promotion issues and publication strategies. He did not have connections among elite black writers and scholars that would help him find talented professors whose research records would merit appointment at one of America’s elite universities. Guinier did not possess the administrative experience needed to build the academic infrastructure associated with an elite academic program.

In contrast, Gates immediately put his skills and social position to use upon assuming his position at Harvard. An extraordinarily well-connected individual among African American cultural elites, he used his personal network to
identify talented scholars to come to Harvard. As an extremely well-published scholar, one who was more influential within his field than most of his colleagues in other departments, Gates’s persona deflected the criticism that black studies was academically illegitimate. As an experienced public intellectual, he likely knew how to defuse attacks and preserve his status. Of course, Gates’s success depended on the opportunities afforded by an extraordinarily wealthy institution, but success requires knowing how to convert opportunities into successful actions, a rare quality.

Rules, Skills, and Survival

The three case studies presented in this chapter suggest that understanding the durability of movement outcomes, such as black studies programs, requires knowledge of how challengers assert their power and how a bureaucracy can sustain social change. One key element is a proponent’s ability to use rhetoric, set agendas, and employ social connections, which sociologists call “social skill.” Another key element is how institutional rules protect movement outcomes. Remove either of these, and it is very easy to see how structural change in organizations can unravel. Thus, black studies programs, like all institutions, are built on a densely woven fabric of mutually reinforcing social conventions and formal rules, which, if taken away, would undermine the field.

Permanent social change depends on a delicate combination of social structure, disorganization, and individual action. Social movement theory shows us that many societal arrangements can be changed through a lengthy process of problem definition, mobilization, and conflict. Challengers disrupt and confront the daily order of the university. The suspension of traditional academic governance created by protest allowed students and outsiders to assert their interests when it otherwise would be very difficult. Mobilization “shakes up” an organization, which permits protesters to have their demands heard. In later stages of change, insiders and an organization’s rules have the capacity to stabilize a movement outcome.

One can see this process unfold in the programs examined in this chapter. Although administrative skill and university rules shaped the fate of these academic units, black studies started out the same way at all three campuses. A small black student group, founded in the mid to early 1960s, used the turmoil of 1968 to insert themselves into the university decision-making process. Radicalized by the events of 1968 and a broader upsurge in black pride, all these
student groups demanded that their university pay more attention to the black community and do more to represent black topics in the curriculum.

Once protest forced black studies onto the agenda, a few professors at each university chose to pursue African American studies. At this point, the role of bureaucratic insiders becomes apparent. At the University of Chicago, James Bruce was nearly alone in his quest to create an Afro-American Studies Institute, and the deans at his university slowed down the process by recommending that the Committee on African and African American Humanities become the vehicle for black studies. At Harvard, Dean Henry Rosovsky took a strong interest when students forced black studies into the debate at Harvard. Rosovsky was able to persuade the Faculty of the Arts and Sciences to approve a department, even in the face of substantial opposition. At Illinois, Grace Holt, a senior professor in folklore and linguistics, rescued black studies after the inner-city studies debacle.

After administrators have agreed to consider proposals for change, people arrive to channel and manage social change. Activists and their allies inside the institution justify their proposals so that they resemble what managers believe is the organization’s proper function. For example, community control was an unsuccessful justification for black studies. It explicitly violated the mission of elite education at research universities and the principle of academic autonomy. Pitching black studies as an extension of existing disciplines was more successful. Although not explicitly addressed in this book, it is also important to note that students occasionally agitated on behalf of black studies after the 1970s, which likely encouraged administrators to avoid directly attacking black studies programs.

Once proposals are accepted, change begins, and bureaucratic insiders assume a larger role. Insiders influence the change process by making strategic appeals and steering proposals through the organization’s decision-making process. A movement’s allies will know exactly how to convert openness to change into a specific agenda for an organization. Insiders, of course, can vary in their ability to navigate the system or in the power they wield. An untenured junior faculty member, for example, will have little power to guide or rescue a flailing program. Similarly, activists who participate in decisions will vary in their ability to pitch proposals and use rhetoric that will encourage power holders to accept change.

Future events may undermine the success of the most savvy insiders and activists. Nearly every program examined in this chapter was hit hard by finan-
cially difficult times and a national decline in undergraduate interest in black studies. However, institutional rules governing academic programs and departments can protect some units, leaving others vulnerable to attack and erosion. The nondepartmental program is an inherently less stable form than the academic department, which should not be surprising to readers experienced in academic administration. Perpetual review is an inherently destabilizing process that departments do not have to endure. It would be reasonable to conjecture that the instability of many black studies programs relates to their perpetual need to renegotiate salaries and budgets.

Economist Ron Coase famously argued that firms are islands of stability within turbulent markets. In his view, the firm is a collection of individuals who have established a hierarchy through a series of contracts and informal agreements. Other organizational theorists add that bureaucracies are characterized by complex relationships with outsiders, such as regulators, shareholders, and political constituents. Thus, any social movement injecting itself into an organization must deal with a complex set of cultural norms and legal rules that govern the internal workings of the organization, as well as the organization’s relations to outsiders. If a movement fails to understand the organization as an organization, rather than merely another arena for mobilizing and agitation, then the movement’s accomplishments are jeopardized. An awareness of how organizations operate will help individuals establish new structures that are resilient. Individuals working on behalf of a movement will use institutional rules to shield organizational change from unforeseen events that may counteract the work of the most skillful activists.