This book began with two questions. First, how did black studies accommodate to the university? Second, how does the institutionalization of black studies illustrate a social movement’s impact on organizations?

I answered these questions by showing how black studies grew out of the disillusionment with the civil rights movement and the subsequent surge of black cultural nationalism. Upset that blacks did not immediately gain the social and economic equality promised by the civil rights movement, activists created groups that aggressively pushed for political power. Some groups, like the Black Panthers, established strong links with college students at campuses such as Merritt College and San Francisco State College, encouraging them to demand concessions from administrators. By the late 1960s, black student groups across the country called for increased affirmative action in admissions, financial support for minority undergraduates, black-themed dormitories, and, of course, black studies.

Demands for black studies often entailed serious confrontations with university administrators. College leaders’ responses to protesters had a dramatic impact on how conflicts played out. Administrators who were inconsistent in their response to the black studies movement could escalate conflict. Deans and presidents often viewed black studies as illegitimate, or they simply saw it as a low priority. Students then staged strikes and building sit-ins—techniques honed in the civil rights movement—to force universities to establish black studies programs. At other times, deans and professors would side with stu-
dents by helping them develop proposals that would be acceptable to the university bureaucracy, thus defusing conflict.

The long-term consequence of student actions could be seen only a few years later as black studies crystallized as an academic institution. Administrators insisted that black studies programs mitigate their most nationalist tendencies and adopt the practices of other academic disciplines. Proposals framing black studies programs as a resource for the black community were met with stiff resistance. Anything that rang of cultural nationalism was quickly labeled “politicized black studies,” which was inconsistent with the academy’s need to produce objective knowledge. The version of black studies that tended to succeed was one that allied itself with existing academic disciplines.

The creation and institutionalization of black studies programs shows how social movements disrupt organizations to promote new policies and practices, enact structural change, and trigger lengthy stabilization processes. Black studies’ creation from the Experimental College in San Francisco shows how organizations themselves can generate new institutional forms by altering existing practices. At San Francisco State College, students used the format of the student-run “current issues” course to invent a curriculum that was then pushed on administrators. The black studies curriculum combined ideas from outside the organization (cultural nationalism) with practices inside the organization (student-led education).

Black student actions raise a number of important issues regarding organizational response to protest. A well-organized protest campaign can force issues onto an organization’s agenda, or activists can take advantage of other conflicts to manipulate the agenda. Activists did this at Harvard University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois at Chicago when they used conflicts over the Vietnam War and race relations as an opportunity to frame black studies as a university priority. Another issue raised by incidents such as the Third World Strike is that conflict not only disrupts the organization from the inside but ruptures the organization’s connections to the wider public. As the Third World Strike showed, if administrators are seen as weak, then an organization’s board of trustees will have no confidence in the administration. The inability to control insurgency leads to a debilitating spiraling of public confidence. The dual pressure of uncontrolled disruption and political censure hastens the collapse of an organization’s leadership.

If activists prevail in a dispute, administrators must decide how change will occur. Organizational culture asserts itself at this point. Administrators will have
many proposals to choose from and will gravitate toward those that agree with their view of what the organization should do. In the case of black studies, proposals supported by nationalist arguments were rejected because they were seen as incompatible with academic norms. Community education was jettisoned in favor of elite training. Black studies formulated as an interdisciplinary enterprise became the standard.

Resonance with organizational culture is not enough. A proposal to assemble black studies from existing social science and humanities courses still needs to be approved and defended from subsequent attack. For durable social change, savvy insiders must use their knowledge of decision-making procedures to steer proposals through the entire process. Opponents of change may choose to undermine a proposal at certain meetings, or unexpected events may pull attention away from a movement’s demands. A movement’s representatives inside an organization must use their social networks, personal charisma, and knowledge to push proposals through. These actions—the strategic manipulation of the environment within the organization—stabilize the movement outcome.

An organization’s rules and external constituents can help a movement endure. A new policy or work unit that has been created as the result of movement actions might be protected by rules guaranteeing publicity or money. For example, when the black studies programs examined in this book atrophied in the 1980s, they were still listed in course catalogs and still commandeered minimal resources. A for-profit firm might have quietly eliminated such a unit, but by publicizing the unit in course catalogs and other publications, the university improved the program’s chances for survival. As long as a black studies program had office space, at least one or two faculty members, and official standing in the university’s publications, future professors could have a chance at rehabilitating the program. External constituents play a similar role. Support from the Ford Foundation helped black studies programs through their first years. Although it is difficult to argue from counterfactuals, it would not be surprising if at least a few of the programs sponsored by the Ford Foundation might not have survived without outside funding. If nothing else, the grants brought black studies programs a modest amount of protection from critics.

Once an organization changes in response to a social movement, people must be hired to carry out new policies. For black studies, professors were hired to design and teach the new curriculum. The assembling of a new staff is an opportunity for an occupational group to form. The rise of a new professional group within a targeted organizational field is another indicator of a
movement’s long-term impact. Furthermore, the position of a new group relative to other occupational groups indicates how a movement’s legacy is situated within a larger organizational field. The data on the black studies profession indicates that it has not achieved the autonomy associated with older, more established academic groups, such as historians, that have asserted exclusive claims over areas of teaching within the university. Black studies professors are trained in many disciplines and teach in a wide variety of non-black studies programs.

The remainder of chapter 7 discusses this book’s implications for the study of movements and organizations. First, I discuss how the research presented in this book advances theories of movements and organizations. By doing so, I outline a theory of organizational crisis that captures what was learned in the examination of the black student movement. Second, I discuss how black studies “chilled out” by mitigating nationalism and dropping community education. However, rather than seeing this as a cooptation process, I argue that black studies and the rest of academia are partners in a coevolution process. Black studies changed to become accepted, but its admission into the academy allowed intellectuals to debate a wide range of issues, such as the importance of literary canon, Afrocentrism, and multiculturalism. Third, I discuss how the findings of this book might be generalized to other circumstances. Specifically, I propose the idea of the “counter center,” a formalized place inside mainstream organizations where alternative viewpoints are established. A wide variety of political phenomena might be understood as attempts to create spaces within states and other mass organizations where minority opinions can be voiced. This chapter’s conclusion suggests avenues for future research.

Sociological Implications: The Bureaucracy in Crisis

Theories of movement-organization interaction should address how organizations themselves generate conflict and how movements affect an administration’s relations with political supporters. The mobilization for black studies shows how organizations themselves might escalate or mitigate conflict. While it is true that black students were determined to establish black studies in some form, it is also true that administrative responses to the black studies movement affected the intensity of the conflict. The Black Student Union at San Francisco State College did not stage the Third World Strike until they felt that the administration was dragging out the decision to implement the new program.
In contrast, by working with Harvard Afro and quickly bringing proposals to the faculty senate, Harvard professors and deans reduced the potential for conflict. Of course, savvy students can use their access to the university to avoid conflict altogether. At the University of Illinois at Chicago, black studies proposals emerged from students and faculty who were responding to black-white conflicts. However, the black students were clever enough to take their appeals for black studies directly to sympathetic administrators and professors, who then steered the proposal through university committees.

The four cases of student protest in this book suggest that strikes, sit-ins, and general unhappiness with the curriculum often stemmed from unmet expectations associated with a university’s response to movement demands. The university is one of the most difficult institutions to change in modern society. Unlike privately held firms, where power is concentrated in the owner’s hands, universities are governed by their workers (the professors and staff) and by external supervising boards. Any attempt to change a university must pass through multiple stages of approval. As black studies advocates found out, even friendly administrators may need years to push proposals through a university’s internal decision-making process. The black studies movement chose an unusually stubborn target.

It is not surprising that universities attracted so much ire from black students and intellectuals, because higher education institutions can take years to consider a single degree program. In contrast, Congress can legislate major social change during one session, and courts struck down key elements of segregation with a single decision. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a stunning sequence of civil rights victories: the 1955 Brown vs. Board decision, the 1957 and 1964 Civil Rights Acts, and a wave of legislation and court decisions that abolished segregation. Although the political process leading to the civil rights movement may have taken years, the movement achieved its most visible goals in a relatively short span of time.

The pace of change on college campuses must have seemed glacial to activists, especially after Martin Luther King’s murder, an event that intensified calls for black autonomy. College campuses were slow to desegregate, at least in comparison with other educational institutions (see chapter 2). Furthermore, demands for curricular change could take years of internal debate at a university. Two years of bureaucratic maneuvering for a black studies proposal may seem normal to a college administrator, but students must have viewed it as endless stonewalling. An important lesson for students of movements and
organizations is that the speed of a bureaucracy’s response to a social movement is a factor in how movements interact with their targets. Slow-moving targets—like universities—probably generate anger among their challengers, who might resort to more confrontational tactics.

Compliance with a social movement sets the stage for future conflict. Resistance to a movement’s demands becomes a rallying point. Aggrieved clients and workers can do all kinds of things, from petitioning to violence. Not all tactics are equally likely to achieve the movement’s demands (see chapter 6). Movement tactics force administrators to play a careful balancing act. On the one hand, they might be sympathetic to protesters. If so, the protesters must be just a little disruptive, so that administrators will have room to act. Highly disruptive protest shows that organizational leaders are weak and unable to assert control. If administrators disagree with protesters, they can use disruption as a reason to eject demonstrators and oppose change, which invites further dissent.

Conflicts between activists and administrators draw attention to another point: a movement might have to divide managers from their political supporters. An important theme in the Third World Strike analysis was that the black students’ actions undermined sympathetic administrators. The San Francisco College presidents were already assailed by political enemies because they had apparently lost control of the campus. The California colleges were part of a larger political system, which included the state assembly, the governor’s office, and the California State Department of Education. Survival in this system requires that any college leader know how to operate in that environment. Politically unskilled leaders, such as Robert Smith, face powerful enemies, such as Governor Ronald Reagan, who can sabotage their leadership.

The evidence in this book suggests that extreme disruption prevents an organization from gaining the support it needs to respond to a movement. Universities where black students engaged in harassment, vandalism, and violent disruptions were less likely to create black studies programs. Liberal administrators seemed paralyzed in the face of the Third World Strike. Black students at both Harvard and the University of Illinois quickly distanced themselves from the more disruptive antiwar protesters and allied with sympathetic deans. A major foundation avoided administrators who identified closely with campus protesters. The implication is that extremely disruptive movements may prevent bureaucratic elites from acting on their behalf, a hypothesis that can be tested with evidence from other movements.

The inability of embattled college administrations to procure political sup-
port highlights the links between an organizational field (such as higher education) and the entire society. Movements are likely to have a limited impact on targeted organizations when actions clash too much with the ideologies justifying an organization’s existence. Recent management scholarship has argued that a given organization’s structure and behavior is attributable to the “institutional logics” motivating managers and workers.¹ That is, the people who participate in an organization try to shape it in ways reflecting their ideological priorities. In the academic sector, university practices are developed to facilitate research and teaching led by autonomous scholars. Many of the practices associated with academia are attempts to enact this ideal. In other sectors, there are practices designed to emphasize profitability, public accountability, professional expertise, community service, and independence from politics. The flagrant violation of these rules and disregard for the culture motivating them encourage investors, donors, patrons, and the state to withdraw their support.² This line of thought, often called neoinstitutional theory, views organizations as tightly linked with their social environment.³

This argument about movements and the organization’s political context draws attention to the fact that protesters challenge what people think are appropriate activities for an organization. By definition, movement participants challenge what is accepted by society, thus causing problems for managers. For example, the black studies movement challenged the idea that the academic disciplines in 1968 were offering an education relevant for black students. They also introduced ideas that were new to universities, such as community control and student participation in departmental administration. This book provides many instances of college leaders and professors resisting black studies advocates because they deviated seriously from academia’s standards. Martin Kilson, a critic of the Harvard department, attacked black studies in the 1970s because the department’s governing committee included a student representative. During the Third World Strike, Hayakawa’s antistudent rhetoric was often an appeal to academia’s norms. He insisted at various times that teaching and college policy would not be driven by students. He said that professors, not students, would determine how classes were conducted. It was Hayakawa’s appeal to the “logic” of higher education that initially won him support from California politicians and paved the way for his future success in public office. The cultural ideals shared by administrators and their constituents are tools used by movement activists and their opponents in their conflicts.

In general, one would expect that any movement seriously challenging the
cultural and political underpinnings of an organization would have difficulty in accomplishing its goals.⁴ The argument offered here is an extension of arguments made by sociologists Amy Binder, Marc Ventresca, Michael Lounsbury, Paul Hirsch, and others who see movement activists and organizational leaders as fighting over the framing of political issues. They argue that organizations respond to proposals that can be justified by the organization’s culture.⁵

I argue for a much broader understanding of this insight. Not only do challengers play to the beliefs of administrators, but new organizational forms, such as black studies programs, must be compatible with the practices stemming from the broader political culture and the movement that sponsored the institution. The organizational structures promoted by movements must be modified so they will be successfully integrated into existing institutions. At the same time, new organizational forms, to be viable within the movement, must often have some appeal to the activists who created them. For these reasons, movement-inspired organizational forms are often hybrids combining new politics with old values. The conflicting frameworks of movements and their targeted bureaucracies create an ambiguous moral space where a movement outcome survives by appealing to the ethical frameworks of both power holders and challengers.

Reaching too far toward a movement endangers new organizations. Witness the fate of the Institute of the Black World or the attempts to institutionalize community education within the university. These forms of black studies failed to consistently attract support from outside the nationalist movement. Although university elites were willing to endorse black studies, and even critics thought the field possessed “symbolic value,” there was widespread disapproval of any academic unit eschewing traditional academic governance. Attempts to organize a university program with external “community” input usually failed. However, if activists can find some common ground with administrators, they are more likely to have their proposals accepted.

It is misleading, however, to see movements as ceding all ground to the dominant culture. Black studies’ institutionalization shows that movements test cultural boundaries; they do not mimic them, but expand them through hybridization. Social movements expand the “institutional vocabulary” of a field such as higher education by questioning what is acceptable and extracting compromises between current behavioral norms and the movement’s demands. Thus, the construction of black studies was not guided only by “institutional logics” that enforce conformity within higher education. Rather, the
black studies movement generated a range of alternatives, some of which were modified so they could be deemed acceptable to at least a few university leaders. The cultural imperatives of higher education were used to discard proposals that were too radical, but that left many proposals that subtly changed the criteria of acceptable academic work. Thus, if movement activists can gain a sufficiently strong understanding of bureaucratic processes and outcomes, they can alter the organization’s logic. Functional black studies programs signal that the field has become part of the university. It is not surprising that the black studies movement was soon followed by movements for women’s studies and other ethnic studies.

The Chilling-Out of Black Studies

Black studies achieved a degree of stability by abandoning cultural nationalism and community education. The academic system, for the most part, is not organized around notions of community service. Some academic disciplines, such as public policy, do have public service missions; most do not. Academic disciplines have two functions, which were not compatible with the goals of many black studies advocates. First, academic disciplines create and transmit knowledge. A particular organization, such as a liberal arts college, might be more oriented toward transmission of knowledge rather than its production, but ultimately, the academic system gives the largest rewards to those who create knowledge. Academic units in research universities that do not focus on research will be jeopardized. Second, academic disciplines must engage in expert certification. A sign that an academic discipline has achieved high status is that its members have gained the power to award degrees and recognize other experts in the field. In short, academic disciplines engage in the training of elites, not the broader population.

Community-education abandonment resulted in the embrace of these two principles: black studies programs were pulled toward research and elite training. At the University of Chicago, deans who considered black studies would take activists seriously only if they dropped community education and aligned themselves with the university’s goal of elite education. Universities would hire only people with traditional academic credentials to run their black studies committees. At the University of Illinois, inner-city studies failed to get approval. Even in the analysis of the Ford Foundation grant program, there were repeated instances of administrators bragging that “political” or separatist
black studies was rejected. These administrators insisted that black studies adopt the traditional academic model. Furthermore, the Ford Foundation insisted on funding activities that would make black studies resemble other academic disciplines by supporting teaching and research in elite universities.

In exchange for drastically reducing cultural nationalism and community education, black studies became a viable academic field. Black studies programs then survived because they were protected by the same institutional mechanisms that protect other units, such as English departments. Professors were not fired for low enrollments; budget rules required that the department receive minimal funds; and black studies could continue to exist no matter what happened. Symbolism also played an important part. Black studies was still listed in course catalogs and in other university publications, even when individual programs may have been in recession. These mechanisms don’t guarantee that a program will be successful. Rather, they are stopgap measures, designed to prevent unexpected problems, such as low enrollments, from completely destroying a program. They help a program survive until better times arrive.

Academic black studies based on traditional social sciences and humanities is not the only path to stability, but I believe it is the most dependable one. At least one black studies program has achieved widespread recognition for an unapologetic Afrocentric stance—the Temple University Department of African-American Studies. Although Afrocentrism is different from black nationalism, the Temple program is worth discussing because Afrocentrism is viewed by practitioners and critics as sufficiently different from the schools of thought that characterize other programs.⁶ Therefore, it is worth contrasting the evolution of the Temple department with the other programs examined in this book.

The most thorough academic study of the Temple program is Mario Small’s 1999 study, which looked at the Temple and Harvard departments. His findings echo many of this book’s conclusions. Both programs were prompted by student activism, and both went into a period of decline in the 1970s. Small’s study focuses on program leadership and the cultivation of audiences. He attributes the success of each program to the actions of individuals: Molefi Asante, chair at Temple and creator of Afrocentrism, and Henry Louis Gates Jr., who chaired the Harvard department (see chapter 4). Both leaders were academic entrepreneurs who bolstered their programs by making strategic appeals to intellectuals and the educated public. The difference is that Asante made appeals to rad-
ical intellectuals and community leaders, while Gates improved his standing by appealing to more traditional audiences in the academy. Also, Gates focused on joint hires, while Asante built his program around a core faculty within the department (see chapter 4). Small’s point is that each program chair used journal publications, books, and ties with professors and community leaders as tools for cultivating legitimacy in university and intellectual circles. Improved standing in social circles outside the university allowed each chair to successfully argue that his program merited continued support.  

What I would add to Small’s analysis is an emphasis on the strategic use of academic bureaucracy itself. Asante and Gates employed the strategy of “structural legitimation,” which management scholar Howard Aldrich describes as an entrepreneur’s attempt to bolster the standing of his or her organization by exhibiting “the proper form expected of organizations in that population.” Asante and Gates used traditional academic organizations such as the degree program to bolster the legitimacy of African American Studies. They used the American research university itself, a nineteenth-century invention, in their search for status. Leadership of an academic program at a major research university allowed each scholar to associate his version of black studies with accepted academic activities: the journal, the academic monograph, and the degree program. The effect was to make controversial schools of thought acceptable through their association with routine academic behaviors. It is also true that an academic program can legitimize the ideas generated by the program. Simply having a graduate program in which certain ideas, like Afrocentrism, are taught legitimizes these ideas. It is not surprising, then, that Asante and Gates both pushed for black studies doctoral programs. The degree program itself was used to bolster the legitimacy of black studies through the mechanism of structural legitimacy.  

The success of the Temple University program speaks to the broader issues raised in this section. If community education and cultural nationalism were so incompatible with academic mores, then how did Asante establish Temple as an undisputed center of Afrocentric scholarship? Small’s analysis provides much of the answer. There are niches within the academy. It is not implausible for an academic program to occupy an unpopular position if it is the first to do so. Asante was able to appeal to a very specific intellectual constituency that did not have a visible and highly placed representative in the academy in the 1980s.  

Another reason for Afrocentrism’s success at Temple is that it is a more insti-
tutionally flexible philosophy than cultural nationalism. Mario Small is careful to note that Asante insisted that Afrocentrism is compatible with other disciplines. He cites the 1998 edition of *The Afrocentric Idea*, which states: “Black Studies is undisciplinary but has multiple emphases or areas of interest.” From this perspective, an Afrocentric scholar could simultaneously pursue scholarly publication in disciplinary journals while building ties with community activists and other scholars. A program staffed with Afrocentric scholars can comfortably work in a predominantly white university. There is little need to engage in arguments over community control and thus jeopardize a department. All that administrators need is a tolerance for scholars who occasionally publish articles in Afrocentric forums and teach Afrocentric courses.

There are few other programs that have chosen to emphasize cultural nationalism or other philosophies that might be viewed as unorthodox. One example is the program closely associated with Maulana Karenga at California State University, Long Beach. The program is popular among undergraduates, but until recently it did not host journals or award graduate degrees, which likely limited its institutional impact. Another example is Amiri Baraka (aka LeRoi Jones), once a nationalist and later a Marxist, who headed the SUNY Stony Brook program for many years. While Baraka himself is an internationally renowned poet and activist, the SUNY Stony Brook department, although respected, does not possess the research apparatus that Temple does. My goal is not to downplay the successes of either program. I merely point out that two prominent programs associated with nationalists have not created the sort of intellectual or institutional presence associated with Temple’s program. These programs remain committed primarily to undergraduate teaching and do not seem to have developed the institutional structure needed to establish wider academic influence. I raise this point to support my broader contention that the dominant style of black studies is not overtly associated with nationalism. Rather, the typical black studies program resembles Harvard’s, an interdisciplinary unit that appeals to both black and liberal white audiences with its interdisciplinary credentials.

Despite Afrocentrism’s viability as a legitimizing framework for black studies at Temple and the popularity of nationalism in a few schools, nationalism and related philosophies have not been officially adopted by many programs, especially those in research universities. As shown in this book’s discussion of programs at Harvard, Illinois-Chicago, Chicago, Howard, and Vanderbilt, it is extremely difficult for university administrators to grant formal recogni-
tion to an academic unit displaying any fondness for nationalism or related philosophies.

The amelioration of nationalism in exchange for political survival might be viewed as an example of co-optation. Positive responses from mainstream institutions are often interpreted as attempts to channel political movements, a position Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward advocated in the seminal book *Regulating the Poor*.¹⁰ This perspective mischaracterizes black studies’ relationship to the academic mainstream. A more accurate view is that black studies and the academy are partners in a coevolution process. Black studies and the academy have changed together, responding to each other’s demands. Although the academy rejected demands for black-only education and community control, it did accept black studies. This allowed black studies to further influence academia and made possible future developments such as Afrocentrism, black studies Ph.D. programs, and a stronger acceptance of the African American community as a topic worthy of academic attention.

One recent example of black studies’ impact on the academy is the multiculturalism debates of the 1990s. Black studies scholars were central participants in these debates. Scholars such as Hazel Carby and Henry Louis Gates Jr. were arguing against Afrocentrists, who wanted a distinctly African view of culture, and traditionalists, who questioned whether African American literary works merited comparison with the great works of Western culture. Prominent participants in the debate were often black studies professors or contributors to journals or other forums associated with black studies. A professorship in black studies allowed many scholars to have a high profile in these debates. Being a black studies professor meant that one had a special stake in the argument and commanded attention. Although the long-term outcome of multiculturalism may not be understood for decades, it is undeniable that black studies professors were key players in an academic movement that has had a strong impact on current scholarship, classroom teaching, and education policy.

Black studies’ early history was marked by a struggle over nationalism, but the field found some stability after cultural nationalism’s rejection. This may be viewed as a negative outcome, but I argue that it has allowed black studies to influence the academy. If black studies programs had never been established, it is hard to imagine that the modern academy would have engaged with multiculturalism and related issues with the same intensity.
Black Studies Programs: Counter Center and Movement Outcome

The acceptance and continuing existence of black studies programs shows that social movements create durable spaces within mainstream institutions. Following St. Clair Drake’s observation, black studies should be viewed as an oppositional space within research universities and liberal arts colleges. This argument recognizes that black studies programs have strong connections with existing academic disciplines and universities, but they have not yet defined the mainstream.

I call centrally located oppositional spaces “counter centers” to indicate their ambivalent position. Movement activists target institutions they view as important. The black studies movement proponents clearly understood that occupying a position inside the university system would allow them to project their message. Using sociologist Ed Shils’s phrasing, activists thought “the power of the ruling class derives from its incumbency of its central institutional system” and acted to appropriate some of that power for themselves.¹¹ At the same time, a movement might not be completely accepted within central institutions. Certainly, the black studies programs examined in this book continue to face resistance from administrators and hostile critics. They might never become completely accepted like other academic programs and have become a routine opposition within the academy.

This movement outcome—the oppositional space within a central organization—has not yet received much attention from social movement researchers, although there are some notable exceptions.¹² Much social movement research focuses on state policies, electoral outcomes, or regime changes because many movements target one of society’s most central institutions, the state.¹³ Therefore, it is logical to consider state responses and electoral outcomes, which can be viewed as movement successes or failures. However, focusing on oppositional spaces draws attention to how an organization itself sustains a movement. Much like an out-of-government party acting as a “shadow government,” an oppositional space acts as a routine opposition within society’s central institutions. Theorizing about oppositional spaces extends the insights of scholars such as Mary Katzenstein who show how movements take their fights into a bureaucracy.¹⁴ The counter center is the outcome achieved by a movement that
successfully institutionalizes outside of the social movement sector and within the targeted bureaucracy.

Large, open organizations, such as universities, religious organizations, and professional associations, are likely places for the creation of counter centers. Research on intellectual movements provides many examples of such alternative spaces inside academic disciplines. Neil Gross’s study of the philosophy profession shows how discontent with analytical philosophy, the dominant school of Anglo-American philosophy in the mid-twentieth century, encouraged disgruntled academics to create their own groupings within the American Philosophical Association.¹⁵ Some academic disciplines can be seen as counter centers within the university system. Women’s studies programs, for example, are the outcome of the 1970s women’s liberation movement. These academic units employ professors who explicitly see themselves as pursuing research and teaching that is a distinct alternative to the rest of academia. Women’s studies as an institutional alternative is such a prominent idea that it has fomented a discussion called the “mainstreaming debate.” The issue is whether women’s studies programs should become more allied with traditional academic disciplines, or whether the field should continue to cultivate its distinctiveness.¹⁶ The same can be said about a number of other disciplines that have emerged since the 1960s, such as Asian American studies, Chicano/Latino studies, and Native American studies. There are also current movements toward establishing programs in queer studies and disabilities studies. What these disciplines have in common is the desire to institutionalize some form of knowledge that is not found or emphasized in existing disciplines. They are also based on identities emerging from social distinctions such as race, gender, or sexual orientation. Many of the issues raised in this book also appear in the history of these disciplines, and I would expect that some of the same dynamics have played out.

Counter centers also exist in noneducational contexts. Consider the Roman Catholic Church. The church’s history is replete with movements and revolts against papal authority. Although some movements resulted in schism, others led to organizational change and the establishment of counter centers such as the Jesuit order, which has often found itself in opposition to the Holy See.

Perhaps the most striking recent case is the liberation theology movement within the Catholic Church. Following a period of extreme dissatisfaction with the Latin American church in the 1950s, dissident priests and their followers
developed an ideology linking social justice, Catholic dogma, and occasional elements of Marxism. Thus, new ideology resulted in institutional change in the church. By 1955, priests and others associated with the early liberation theology movement formed an organization within the Catholic Church called CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano). This organization sponsored well-attended conferences and exerted strong influence on the rest of the church by promoting the Vatican II reforms.¹⁷ CELAM became such a strong focal point for dissent that it was targeted by Pope John Paul II in the 1980s, who attempted to delegitimize liberation ideology and its attendant organizations, the local “base ecclesiastic communities.”¹⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, was appointed by John Paul II in the early 1980s to criticize liberation theology and the movement’s connections with Marxist governments. Although liberation theology and its institutions have been attacked and conservatives have won key leadership positions in CELAM, rank-and-file members have retained their pro-poor stance. Some liberation theologians claim that the church’s leadership has accepted a few tenets of liberation theology, such as an emphasis on Christ’s care for the poor and recognition of capitalist exploitation.¹⁹

Secular organizations also can have counter centers. Consider the major American political parties. Movements within each party have created caucuses, think tanks, and lobbying organizations, many of which exist within the confines of the party itself. These groups understand that they do not represent the mainstream of the party, but they are dedicated to reminding party elites and voters of their minority political interests, hoping to shift the mainstream in their direction. Even occupational groups and professions contain alternative spaces and movements. Unions will often have more radical subsections and caucuses. Perhaps the most interesting example of a sort of counter center within a professional group is Rao, Monin, and Durand’s description of haute cuisine as a movement within the French cooking establishment.²⁰

What do universities, churches, professional associations, and mass political parties have in common that allows them to sustain counter centers? First, these groups tend to be large organizations that sustain a variety of subgroups.²¹ The examples I provided are enormous organizations, with thousands, sometimes millions, of members. These groups often have rules that permit the creation of caucuses and sects. Second, these groups tend to have relatively weak internal authority, especially when compared to organizations in which leaders wield a great deal of formal power, such as firms, total institutions like pris-
ons, and nondemocratic states. Leaders in organizations such as mass religions and political parties draw their power from shared norms that tolerate a moderate degree of value diversity. Third, these are groups in which it is difficult to expel members. Although each of these groups has mechanisms for ejecting dissidents, they are often time consuming and costly to enforce.

The organizations are also semipublic, in the sense that their ideologies encourage a broad membership. Mass political parties, for instance, require almost nothing of their recruits, and anyone can join them. Universities admit thousands of new students each year and encourage a broad range of recruits. Some universities have open-admissions policies, which allow anyone to enroll. The Roman Catholic Church recruits internationally and claims to be a religion of universal relevance. These large organizations, because of their “public” ideologies, probably tacitly encourage dissent with leaders. They rarely expel dissidents. If there is enough dissent, groups within the system can act together to acquire resources and establish their own organizations.

The presence of counter centers suggests that our understanding of intellectuals and social movements requires some modification. There is a large literature that views intellectuals as having an important role in social movements because they define problems and articulate grievances for the groups they represent. Gramsci’s theory of the organic intellectual is one such theory. According to Gramsci, socialist movements needed to develop their own intellectuals who would articulate the needs of the working classes. Other scholars have developed similar arguments about other social movements. An important dimension of this literature is the claim that movement intellectuals must work in “free spaces,” which are institutions operated by the social movement where movement participants are at liberty to express their views and collaborate on strategy. Such free spaces might include schools, party organizations, and self-identified movement organizations.

The counter center idea draws attention to the possibility that an intellectual’s role changes when a movement reshapes an organization. Intellectuals may leave free spaces and move into counter centers. When working in a free space, the intellectual’s primary goal is problem framing, communicating with outsiders, and helping the movement coordinate its actions. In the counter center, intellectuals must advance the movement’s goals within the organization’s political context. Black studies illustrates this well. Some prominent black studies scholars had ties to black power organizations. Maulana Karenga, the founder and former chair of black studies at the California State University,
Long Beach, was the founder of the US organization, one of the most influential black militant groups in the late 1960s. Upon becoming chair, he assumed the role of professor—teaching classes, publishing books through the US organization’s University of Sankore Press, and organizing conferences.²⁵ While maintaining connections to the US organization, Karenga established himself as a publisher of scholarly works and thus satisfied his university’s cultural imperatives.

Movement intellectuals working in new institutional spaces are subject to the same pressures as anyone who works in the organization. Therefore, they are subjected to cross-pressures from the organization and the social movement. In the case of black studies, university administrators, for example, will demand the same signs of scholarly productivity as they would from any other professor. Administrators want to know about enrollments, publication records, and grants. At the same time, students and activists demand attention from professors. Similarly, one can easily imagine that intellectuals in other counter centers—think tanks, seminars, and so on—would feel torn between serving their constituency and a wider public audience.

This discussion suggests that a counter center’s growth and stability depend on how it is connected to other institutions and how it draws social and financial resources. Black studies programs, for example, are not isolated from other disciplines. In fact, black studies programs are routinely built on an interdisciplinary foundation through hiring from other departments outside the program. However, this might not always be the case. Counter centers might have independent sources of income and legitimacy. The Institute of the Black World was a “black-conscious” operation that tried to cultivate a clientele and identity independent of the academy (see chapter 5). The institute’s goal was to be associated with the academy but still have an independent source of income. Although it failed in the long term, the Institute of the Black World was self-sufficient for almost twelve years and survived with occasional grants and support from its membership. Occasionally, one will see a black studies program that combines external and internal support. One less-often discussed aspect of Henry Louis Gates’s tenure as chair of the Harvard program is that he helped generate independent sources of income (such as grants and gifts) that could support scholars with strong ties to other disciplines.

My purpose in discussing the counter center—the space within mainstream institutions created by a social movement—is to bring attention to a kind of social movement outcome that is possible in a modern, highly complex soci-
ety. When coupled with a tolerance for internal diversity, a society’s central organizations—educational institutions, occupational groups, religions, mass political parties, and the state—may house parallel institutions embodying values that compete with a society’s mainstream. If the institution is large enough and the dissidents sufficiently skillful, a movement can insist that it be accommodated within these central institutions. By labeling black studies a counter center, I hope to draw attention to the dynamics of such spaces.

Open Questions

The analysis of black studies’ history as movement outcome raises questions for future research. First, can the theory presented in this book be supported with data from other academic disciplines? The first women’s studies program, for example, followed the first black studies program by only one year. So far, there has been no analysis of female protest on college campuses resembling that presented in chapter 6. Since women’s studies programs continued to be created throughout the 1980s and 1990s, one suspects that many of these programs were not closely tied to student strikes. Therefore, other forces must be at work. A related question concerns the coevolution of black studies with women’s studies and other types of ethnic studies. How did black studies, ethnic studies, and women’s studies affect each other? Did they grow together as a group, or did each discipline evolve independently after the black studies movement legitimized identity-based academic work? A systematic comparison will show to what extent black studies promoted the growth of closely allied disciplines.

Second, what comparisons can be made between black studies programs and other counter centers? How do black studies programs, as oppositional spaces, differ from political caucuses and dissident religious orders? One hypothesis is that academic disciplines are the oppositional institution least likely to have an impact. Academic life is often ruled by intellectual trends, which minorities have little ability to change. In contrast, a religious order may have control over schools and institutes, which can be a tool for creating religious change. For example, radical Islamists have used schools as a launching point for their views. Academic life is also characterized by professional autonomy, and mainstream disciplines might resent a vocal opposition. In contrast, other organizations, such as democratic states, have mechanisms for integrating minority views into the mainstream. Further theorizing about oppositional politics
within organizations should explain how an organization’s rules, ideologies,
and mission affect a counter center’s impact on the mainstream.

Third, is black studies’ interdisciplinary state permanent? My argument
about black studies as interdiscipline is based on cross-sectional survey data
showing that black studies professors obtained their Ph.D.’s from many disci-
plines and that they frequently taught outside black studies programs. An im-
portant avenue for research will be to understand why black studies has main-
tained this institutional posture. What, exactly, encourages professors to teach
so frequently outside their programs? How quickly will black studies Ph.D.
programs grow? Will these degree programs produce enough graduates so that
programs will be managed primarily by black studies doctorates? Black stud-
ies’ future position in the academy is an open question whose answer will
interest not only black studies scholars, but also sociologists who analyze edu-
cation and science.

The growth of black studies programs motivated important questions about
how social movements change organizations and raises more questions about
how societies respond to political challengers. By looking at how universities
assimilated demands for black-oriented education, this book shows how a rad-
ical educational project was reshaped and channeled into American higher edu-
cation. Black studies will continue to attract activists seeking a more potent
voice for African Americans, critics who see racial consciousness as inimical to
American values, and researchers trying to understand the long-term conse-
quences of the 1960s.