Activism and the Academy: Lessons from the Rise of Ethnic Studies

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Abstract: Ethnic Studies was born from the tumultuous 1960s. Until recently, very little systematic research documented the institutional development of the field. This chapter discusses the following lessons from the growth of Ethnic Studies. First, Ethnic Studies was made possible by political mobilization and protest. It is unlikely that the field would exist today in the same form without student activism. Second, activists promoted many types of Ethnic Studies institutions, but only interdisciplinary and de-radicalized programs inside universities survived in the long term. Third, the field is growing through an expansion in graduate training, but the consequences of this change are unclear. Fourth, the biggest effect of Ethnic Studies might be its effects on other disciplines. It is now common for scholars to write and teach on the topic of American ethnic groups, even they aren’t explicitly associated with Ethnic Studies programs.
Introduction

The 20th century witnessed numerous profound transformations of the academy, ranging from the rise of the American research university (Vesey 1970), to the global expansion of higher education (Frank and Gabler 2006), to its increasing integration with the for-profit sector (Powell, Smith, and Colyvas 2007). One important development is the proliferation of disciplines and areas of study (Brint et al 2009). Much of this trend is attributable to the ever increasing complexity of science, but the proliferation of academic programs is also driven by political and social trends. Starting in the 1960s, there was a marked growth in programs and academic fields related to social identities, such as Ethnic Studies, Women’s Studies and Queer Studies.

The appearance of Ethnic Studies, and other identity based fields of study, presents important questions for social scientists. How, exactly, did Ethnic Studies activists succeed in forging a new discipline? What are the long term consequences of establishing a field that defined itself in both intellectual and political terms? What lessons should scholars draw from studying the institutional development of Ethnic Studies?

These questions can be answered in a number of ways. A historian, for example, might be interested in the origin of the idea for ethnic studies. This essay approaches Ethnic Studies from an organizational perspective. Higher education is a system of organizations and practices that regulate work within these organizations. A new type of academic unit, the Ethnic Studies program, can only be established if proponents successfully navigate this bureaucratic system. Thus, the creation of Ethnic Studies is a political and bureaucratic process. It’s political in the sense that students and scholars are using political tools, such as campus protest, to obtain a new
academic unit. It’s an organizational process because an Ethnic Studies unit can only survive if it can satisfy the goals of the university and successfully obtaining resources such as staff, students, and funds. Consequently, scholars interested in the institutional development of Ethnic Studies have often adopted a process model of program adoption (Rojas 2007; Yamane 2001; Clark 1968).

This essay is organized around the different stages in the implementation of Ethnic Studies programs and the issues raised by this process. The next section provides some background about the nature of Ethnic Studies programs and how sociologists tend to view organizational change. Then, the rise of ethnic studies is discussed as a multi-stage process. First, conditions encouraging an Ethnic Studies movement are discussed. These political conditions include the general liberalization of American culture and the strength of the Civil Rights movement. A successful mobilization then leads to a proliferation of policy options, this chapter’s second topic. Once student activists and professors believe in the idea of a separate Ethnic Studies unit, they offer many proposals, ranging from small modifications of existing curricula to free standing Ethnic Studies institutes. The third topic is success. Policy proposals vary greatly in their implementation, which not only depends on “hard resources” such as funds and available staff, but also on the symbolic resonance of Ethnic Studies. A core finding is that strongly nationalist forms of Ethnic Studies rarely find an audience. Political liberalism and racial integration is a more successful framing for Ethnic Studies than nationalism. A related topic is also addressed, the location and impact of protest on behalf of Ethnic Studies. The issue of disciplinary formation is then examined. How is the field of Ethnic Studies constituted as an interdisciplinary field? From where does it draw its human and intellectual resources? Finally, the concluding sections address policy implications.
Ethnic Studies: Definitions and Debates

Ethnic Studies denotes the field of study that examines the history, culture and social organization of ethnic groups. This area of study usually focuses on American racial groups, even though many adherents have called for a “diaspora” perspective situating American ethnic groups in a global perspective (Gilroy 1993). Ethnic Studies is sometimes cast as an interdisciplinary area that draws from more established fields, such as history, to describe the life and culture of African Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities. The field is organized into disciplines focusing on a single cultural group, such as African American Studies or Asian American Studies. Sometimes, there are academic specialties focusing on more specific groups, such as Puerto Rican Studies or Filipino Studies.

The very first Ethnic Studies units were proposed in 1966 when students at San Francisco State College asked the administration to create a “Department of Black Studies” (Rooks 2006; Rojas 2007a, 2010). This new unit acted an organizational umbrella for traditional courses and student run courses that explore African American topics. This proposal was not accepted or implemented until students staged a strike on behalf of Ethnic Studies in Fall 1968. The College of Ethnic Studies, which included Black Studies, was started in Fall 1969, an event that triggered student strikes for Ethnic Studies at other campuses. Estimates indicate that almost two hundred Black Studies programs were started in the next decade, as were dozens of programs in cognate fields, such as Native American Studies, Asian American Studies, Women’s Studies, Queer Studies, and Gender Studies (Rojas 2007: 170-1).

Ethnic Studies programs were motivated by two conflicting political ideas. Many activists thought that Ethnic Studies could encourage racial integration, a core goal of the Civil
Rights movement (Rojas 2007: 140-3). Both White and non-White students could attend Ethnic Studies and be exposed to different cultures. Activists also relied on ethnic nationalism to justify their proposed reforms. By ethnic nationalism, I refer to the theory that ethnic groups should retain their autonomy by exerting control over cultural, educational, economic or political institutions (Dawson 2001). Within the context of the late 1960s, many Civil Rights activists became disappointed with Civil Rights and thought that the White mainstream would not cede resources or status to African Americans or other minorities. The response of ethnic nationalists was to claim that ethnic groups, such as African Americans, should promote their own agendas through institutions dedicated to that ethnic group, such as Black Studies programs.

The two ideologies associated with Ethnic Studies, integrationism and ethnic nationalism, resulted in competing missions. Integrationism was often associated with a call for alignment with established academic practices and the idea that Ethnic Studies might be beneficial for White and non-White students (Rojas 2007: 140-3). Ethnic nationalism generated a different mission. Nationalists were interested in creating academic knowledge, but they also tended to focus on community service. As discussed in later sections, early Ethnic Studies proposals often included demands for “community education” and outreach to poor ethnic neighborhoods. Some of the most radical proposals even framed Ethnic Studies as an alternative to the capitalist dominated public education system (93-129).

The academic units representing Ethnic Studies vary a great deal in their internal organization and identity. Some units represent themselves as multi-purpose “Ethnic Studies” units where students can concentrate on specific cultural groups, such as Native Americans. One such example is the American Ethnic Studies department at the University of Washington (Department of American Ethnic Studies 2011). Others programs specialize in a single group.
For example, most African American Studies programs focus on Africa descended people, whether they are the United States, Brazil, or elsewhere. There are also important bureaucratic differences in the operation of Ethnic Studies programs (Ford 1973). One model is the department, which contains its own teaching faculty. In contrast, the interdisciplinary program is staffed mainly by professors with joint appointments in other programs and departments. These organizational differences often correspond to philosophical differences. It is not uncommon for Ethnic Studies professors to claim that the organizational format of their program indicates a sort of intellectual status. The program staffed by joint appointments indicates a field that does not have intellectual maturity or autonomy.

Aside from organizational structure, Ethnic Studies is characterized by debates over the mission of the field. One common debate concerns the importance of nationalism and the relationship to other disciplines (Van Deburg 1992; Rojas 2007; Chiang 2009). It is often argued that Ethnic Studies represents a very specific point of view that is not captured within existing disciplinary frameworks. The history taught in an African American Studies programs emerges from an intimate encounter with racial oppression, an experience not found in traditional historical accounts. This example shows the close relationship between values and organization. The Ethnic Studies program is needed because of the lacunae in traditional research. Of course, there are those who dispute this position. Logically, critics have argued, African American Studies, or any other type of Ethnic Studies, can be grouped within the larger framework of the humanities and social sciences.

The debates over ethnically conscious academic work evolved, by the 1980s, into arguments of multiculturalism (Asante and Ravitch 1991; Kalu 1991; Bryson 2005). Definitions vary, but multiculturalists share the belief that educational institutions should represent the views
of multiple ethnic groups. The underlying logic of multiculturalism is accommodation and institutionalized tolerance of ethnic differences. A multicultural high English course would not only teach authors such as William Shakespeare, but it would also teach authors whose works documented or otherwise addressed ethnic differences, such as James Baldwin or Toni Morrison.

**Sociological Theories of Organizational Change**

Organizational scholars offer two crucial insights for those who wish to understand how Ethnic Studies emerged in the university: organizations are embedded in larger social systems and organizational change is a constant process of change and adjustment. This suggests that the story of a new organizational form, such as Ethnic Studies programs is both about political mobilization and bureaucratic expansion. The trajectory of a new academic field is defined by the strategies and resources available to for helping programs and departments survive and prosper inside larger educational institutions.

Organizational sociology tends to view universities in terms of larger populations defined by common practices, beliefs, and relationships. For example, neo-institutional scholars argue that organizations, such as colleges, are embedded in larger political systems that impose constraints (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). These social structures, in turn, are predicated on the values that legitimate the organization. A single university belongs to a larger “field” that includes other universities, accreditation agencies, the state, and the public. Collectively, these actors articulate the values that legitimate universities, such as academic freedom or scientific rigor, and encourage universities to adopt practices instantiating these ideas. Thus, the ability to promote Ethnic Studies depends on how scholars and student activists
defend the field to the publics that govern academia. Resonance with academic culture helps promote Ethnic Studies, while explicit rejection of academic culture would suppress the field.

The second insight is that organizational change is a complex, ongoing process that has no clearly defined terminal point, especially in academic settings (Clark 1968). A new organizational unit, such as an academic program, must show that it is compatible with the goals and culture of the organization. The earliest stages of change involve arguments about missions and values in addition to the assessment of multiple, possibly viable, alternatives. Then, staff and funds must be obtained, which is then followed by implementation. Over time, organizational units and policies are subject to criticism and financial pressures as well as planned changes. Proposing change, staffing, budgets and period evaluations all offer opportunities for allies and critics to appropriate, or undermine, Ethnic Studies programs.

**Conditions Creating the Potential for Change**

The analysis of movement initiated organizational change starts with a description of the broader social trends that created political opportunities. The most basic fact about Ethnic Studies is that it was an outgrowth of the Civil Rights movement (Rooks 2006; Rojas 2007). The Civil Rights movement facilitated the push for Ethnic Studies in multiple ways. On a national level, the Civil Rights movement created an environment particularly conducive to race based structural reform within universities. Americans, in general, were changing their attitudes toward race. Educators, in particular, were willing, for the first time, to consider reforms aimed at helping African Americans, or that brought minority issues into the curriculum.

The Civil Rights movement also facilitated Ethnic Studies through desegregation. For the first time, predominantly White colleges had significant numbers of Black students (Willie and
Cunnigen 1981). Even though intellectuals had discussed something like Ethnic Studies for decades, there were not enough students who could stage a movement. Starting the 1960s, many colleges had hundreds of Black Students, rather than dozens. That shift meant that it was possible to create a politically motivated community of Black Student activists (Rojas 2007: 22-44).

College desegregation enabled the transmission of tactics from the Civil Rights movement to the college campuses. As reported in many histories of the Civil Rights movement, students would often participate in projects such as voter registration drives in the South (e.g., McAdam 1988; Rojas 2007: 34-42). The consequence was that students returned with a radicalized perspective and experience with protest tactics. The original Freedom Ride was in 1961 and other Civil Rights projects continued in the late 1960s. It is not surprising that campus mobilizations escalated shortly thereafter. Accounts of the Ethnic Studies/Black Studies movement at San Francisco State College found that student leaders had spent their summers in the South working for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a central Civil Rights organization. More research needs to be done on the connections between Civil Rights actions and college student leadership, but it is surely the case that students in the late 1960s were exceptionally well versed in political action.

Another crucial factor in the rise of Ethnic Studies is that universities were already very liberal places by the 1960s. Numerous studies of professorial attitudes have shown that professors are more likely to vote for Democrats and are more likely to consider themselves politically liberal, even before the 1960s (see the introductory chapter of this volume). Combined with the turbulent political environment, it is no surprise that many professors were responsive to
demands for Ethnic Studies. Approving Ethnic Studies was way to show that campuses were open to all and that they were serious about desegregation.

Universities themselves acted as incubators for protest. As numerous observers have noted, higher education dramatically expanded in the 1960s (Bayer and Astin 1969; Buchanan and Brackett 1970; Lipset 1976; van Dyke 1998). Campuses expanded enrollments and constructed large housing units. The sudden and unprecedented concentration of students lowered the costs of political activism. It was now relatively easy to summon thousands of students for a demonstration. Universities were now providing facilities for student clubs, which could easily be used as gathering places for political groups (Rojas 2007; see Zhao 2001 for a discussion of university geography and campus protest in China). The university in the Sixties was a place with lots of people, ample resources, and weak administrative control over students. In retrospect, a “perfect storm,” a confluence of ideal conditions, made Ethnic Studies a highly likely, if not inevitable, outcome of the Civil Rights movement.

**Where Protest Happened and How it Happened**

Contentious behavior was crucial in the push for Ethnic Studies. Early studies, focusing on interviews with department chairs, found that many programs, likely a majority, were created after rallies, student strikes, and sit-ins (Blake and Cobb 1976). Later studies find a large correlation between Black student protest and the creation of Black Studies programs (Rojas 2006). A single Black Student protest event nearly triples the odds that a Black Studies program is formed. These findings draw attention to an extremely important issue: the ubiquity of student uprisings and their impact on universities. This section summarizes what is known about student protest in general and how that facilitated Ethnic Studies.
One of the strongest findings is that student protest most frequently occurs in research intensive institutions (Van Dyke 1998; Rojas 2006). Anecdotally, there is much evidence to support this. The most well known examples of campus unrest tend to be research universities, such as the University of California, Berkeley, Columbia University and Cornell University. More systematically, researchers in the late 1960s began to find that protest is most likely to happen in research universities. Scott and El-Assal (1969) found that being a research university is a strong predictor of having campus unrest in the 1960s. A 1970 study by the Urban Institute found similar results (Buchanan and Bracket 1970). In a survey of college presidents and student body presidents, the probability of reporting protest of any kind is much higher in research institutions than in other types of colleges. Among community colleges, for example, the reported rate of protest is almost 0%. Alexander Astin’s (1975) research on college protest found similar patterns. Protest was more likely among research intensive schools than others, and protest was more likely to lead to curricular change. Similar findings are reported in modern research. For example, studies of new student protest tactics show that they are more likely to appear at research universities.

Research on Ethnic Studies protests finds similar patterns. Even though Ethnic Studies was invented by students at San Francisco State College, the universities that are most likely to have an Ethnic Studies program were the research universities. The available evidence suggests that non-elite schools may be the site of innovation, but that Ethnic Studies demands were most commonly implemented in research universities. For example, by 1998, about 50% of research universities had degree granting African American Studies programs (Rojas 2007: 171). In contrast, 20% of selective liberal arts colleges had these programs. The program creation rate was much lower in other kinds of colleges, such as masters colleges and less selective liberal arts
colleges. Similar patterns can be found by looking at other kinds of ethnic studies. A casual glance at the *Index of College Majors*, a College Board publication listing institutions offering specific majors, shows that Asian American Studies programs are likely to be found in research universities in the West or East Coast, Puerto Rican Studies programs are found in northeast research universities, and so forth. This does not imply that Ethnic Studies isn’t found at all in non-research environments. These programs do exist in non-research intensive schools, but at a lower rate. If they teach Ethnic Studies, it is likely in specific courses and not in specially designated programs.

It is important to ask why the research university is such a hospitable place for student activism and Ethnic Studies. It might be hypothesized that research universities have more resources. Wealth, as measured by financial endowments, is correlated with having ethnic studies units. However, the effect of being a research university persists, even when accounting for wealth in statistical models (Rojas 2006), suggesting that wealth is not the only factor. Multiple regression analyses that using wealth as a control variable still yields a significant and substantially large effect for research universities. Similar analyses show that black enrollments, university size (as measured by total enrollments), and other factors do not completely account for the correlation between student protest and Ethnic studies. This consistent finding suggests that there is something distinctive about the research university environment that promotes ethnic studies.

Case studies suggest that research universities are good places for Ethnic Studies because they have a distinct student population and a culture that’s open to new academic disciplines (Rojas 2007: chapters 4 and 5). Students can take the time to protest because they have financial support and they already have the inclination towards politics. Research universities have
students with stronger academic credentials, come from wealthier families, and are less likely to be commuter students. Given that many student activists in the 1960s later rose to political prominence, it might also be an early expression of a political career. Furthermore, universities are places with faculty members who are searching for new topics (Bryson 2005). As long as there is a small, but dedicated, intellectual constituency in the research university, a new field has a chance at survival.

Another question is how protest disrupted the status quo in the research universities, making new academic fields possible. Sociologists and political scientists have long recognized that the way protest happens is important. The type of protest matters a great deal (Rojas 2006). Protest is more likely to be followed by curricular change than no protest, and non-violent Black student protest, such as a rally, is more likely to lead to an African American Studies program than violent action, such as property damage. The importance of non-disruptive protest suggests that protest mattered when it fruitfully addressed the moral framework of the university. When student protestors did violent or disruptive things, they could easily stigmatized and subsequently marginalized from the academic community. In case studies of disruptive Black student protest, it has often been found that violence destabilizes college administrators. For example, in the Third World Strike at San Francisco State College, numerous administrators quit or left because they could not control campus protest, which sometimes lead to violence (Rojas 2007: chapter 3; Rojas 2010a). Administrators were often under pressure from trustees to do something drastic or resign the face of highly disruptive actions. These political pressures prohibited university leaders from negotiating with activists or offering compromises. In contrast, non-disruptive protest gives students a chance to air grievances, develop relationships with faculty and administrators and start the complex process of starting an academic program.
The Menu of Options

The push for Ethnic Studies generated a wide range of options, from ethnic themed courses to separate institutions. Perhaps the most common proposal was that colleges and universities start offering courses on ethnic topics, which entailed a modest change in the orientation of existing academic work as it was then expressed. In some disciplines, the demand for courses and research did not require much effort. Sociology and anthropology, for example, have always addressed ethnicity in some way. It is not surprising that a number of early Black Studies scholars, for example, had earned their doctoral degrees in sociology, such as Joyce Ladner (1998) and Abdul Alkalimat (2009). In other disciplines, focusing on ethnicity was seen as contrary to the spirit of the discipline. In literary studies, Ethnic Studies scholars insisted that works by African American authors such as James Baldwin and Langston Hughes deserved the same status as works written by other canonical authors. Demands to expand the scope of American literary scholarship were met with substantial resistance, as critics insisted that literary merit could not be tied to political claims for curricular reform. These arguments evolved into disputes over multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s when arguments over the enduring value of classical texts altered the terrain of American literary writings (for a summary see Bryson 2005).

Insisting on more teaching and research on American ethnic groups was the most successful proposal to come from the Ethnic Studies movement. Even though there was bitter debate over multiculturalism in the 1990s, it is now routine for a wide range of departments to teach courses that might be called Ethnic Studies (Brint et al 2009; Cole 2006). These topics are
no longer considered controversial and they are considered standard elements of research and
teaching in the humanities and social sciences.

One interesting outcome of the demand for ethnically focused teaching and research is
the existence of multiculturalism requirements on some college campuses. In the 1990s, a
number of student groups asked that college administrations require that all students take courses
on an American ethnic group. David Yamane’s (2001) *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*
(2001) documents the student mobilization around multiculturalism requirements at the
University of California, Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Yamane’s account
focuses on how students promoted multiculturalism courses by appealing to the mission and
liberal culture of universities. These courses are now standard elements of the undergraduate
curriculum at some research universities.

Multicultural course requirements are an example of incremental institutionalized change
that has now become a routine and “taken for granted” part of the curriculum. It is no longer the
case that “culture studies” or “multicultural” course requirements generate much controversy,
aside from long standing conservative critics who tend to criticize most race based educational
practices. There is even the distinct possibility that these courses will become extremely
common, especially as Asian and Latino immigrants increase their numbers and their children
enroll in the higher education system. Ethnic Studies and multicultural courses, required or not,
may be a relatively simple way for administrators and professors to show that a college
education remains relevant to these populations.

In contrast, the Ethnic Studies movement generated other proposals for permanent,
structural change in universities, some of which were, and remain, much more controversial.
Activists routinely demanded Ethnic Studies programs, departments, and research centers (for an extended discussion, see Rojas 2007: 93-129). As noted earlier in this essay, there were many types of academic units proposed, which entail different levels of commitment by the university, and are motivated by different strategic and intellectual concerns (Ford 1973; Daniel 1980; Bankole 200). The proposal requiring the least commitment is probably the interdisciplinary program. This type of academic unit would collect courses on a specific topic, such as African-American Studies, and have jointly appointed professors and adjuncts teach them. The attractive feature of the program model is that the university administration would not have to hire many new faculty members. Instead, they would have scholars who were already interested in Ethnic Studies agree to be listed in the new unit’s faculty roster. By drawing instructors from existing disciplines, one could avoid a contentious debate over whether Ethnic Studies was a legitimate field that deserved the recognized as distinct from others.

The second kind of academic unit is the department, which has its own faculty members, can award tenure, and can be a graduate training center (Ford 1973; Kamoche 1978; Aldridge and Young 2000). In debates over the bureaucratic organization of Ethnic Studies, departments are often seen as the alternative to the interdisciplinary program. Departments almost always have tenured professors and represent disciplines that have attained a high degree of autonomy. Doctoral programs in the arts and sciences are usually located in departments, another sign of their status. The intellectual argument for the department was that it signaled that Ethnic Studies was a distinct area of study and not merely a marginal topic in other fields. Departments required a higher level of commitment from a university. Tenured faculty needed yearly salaries and graduate programs required financial support. These units were not easy to contract once they are established.
A third kind of academic unit is the research center (e.g., Rojas 2007: 151-55; White 2004). In this model, teaching and staffing issues would remain in the hands of the traditional arts and sciences departments. However, interested academics could participate in a separate unit built around common research interests. These academics units would be removed from the traditional needs of teaching and research, and could be flexible. The research center offers seminars, if the administrator thought it was needed, or they could conduct surveys, pay for research, publish journals and books, or hold public lectures.

A fourth kind of academic unit was more innovative – the “cultural center.” In this model, the university would create a student support center on campus aimed at students interested in a particular ethnic group. For example, there was an African American themed dormitory at the University of Pennsylvania (Glasker 2002: 115-28). Cultural centers did not have to residential; they could be aimed at educational activities that don’t fit well with the mission of a typical degree program, such as student counseling or the performing arts. In practice, the distinctions between different kinds of academic units were blurred. Some programs became departments, and departments were often linked to cultural houses and research centers. At some campuses, the Ethnic Studies departments kept their distance from the cultural centers, while others kept close contact.

The most radical ethnic studies proponents promoted separate institutions. For example, at the very beginning of the Ethnic Studies movement, some activists promoted the “Black University” as an alternative to the predominantly white university and the traditional historically Black college (Rojas 2007: 24; McWhorter 1968). The argument was that White institutions were too dominated by racist values, while the historically Black college was too strongly tied to conservative religious groups (Watkins 2001). The alternative was to create an autonomous
institution that was designed to promote Black values and pursue a Black mission, such as helping poor inner city residents or developing Africa.

Not surprisingly, these proposals met with very limited success. For example, there was a proposal in 1969 at Antioch College for the creation of a Black Studies college (Thelwell 1969). This proposal enjoyed some support, but it also alienated many faculty members and ultimately failed. At the University of Illinois, Chicago, the education faculty proposed an Ethnic Studies College to be controlled by “members of the community,” which meant people in poor Chicago neighborhoods. This proposal was rejected in favor of a more traditional academic unit that was completely contained within the university (Rojas 2007: 112-16).

There were some examples of independent Ethnic Studies institutions that managed to be created and survived for some period of time. Nairobi College was a short lived college in East Palo Alto, California (Hoover 1992; Van Deburg 1992). Founded in 1969 to develop Black leadership and push a “Third World” perspective, Nairobi College admitted a few dozen students who wished to learn college level materials from a radical Black perspective. Nairobi College also began a day school for younger children, which focused on teaching Black English and Black history. In North Carolina, activists associated with Duke University started Malcolm X Liberation University (MXLU). MXLU had goals similar to Nairobi College – to train Black leaders and serve the Black community. Like Nairobi College, MXLU explicitly employed a nationalist perspective on education (Belvin 2004). A third case is the Institute for the Black World, an off-shoot of the Atlanta University Center. Founded in 1969 by scholars associated with Atlanta University Center, the IBW would be a think tank where teachers and scholars could develop a new intellectual agenda. The IBW was perhaps the first and most prominent Ethnic Studies think tank (White 2004; Rojas 2007).
All three of these institutions closed. By 1972, MXLU collapsed when funding disappeared. After being critiqued as a racist institution in the media, few people were willing to donate. Nairobi College closed in 1979, after years of declining enrollments and factionalism. The IBW closed in 1984 in the face of similar problems. What these three examples show is that Ethnic Studies did not fare very well in settings independent from the traditional university system. Their strong ideology made it hard to attract donors and maintain a steady income stream, especially in the recession of the 1970s. In contrast, Ethnic Studies institutionalized within the university system survived, though not without problems, till the present.

**Deradicalization**

An important theme emerging from social scientific analyses of Ethnic Studies is deradicalization. That is, in order for Ethnic Studies to be implemented and gain acceptance, Ethnic Studies had to be stripped of its most political trappings. Specifically, proponents had to distance themselves from ethnic nationalism and promise that all courses would be open to both Black and White students. Furthermore, Ethnic Studies courses and departments had to frame their mission in terms of bringing new knowledge to the university, not advocating a political ideology or promoting any particular group.

Reformulating Ethnic Studies as a race neutral enterprise was not a simple process given that the field’s early history was strongly intertwined with the surge of ethnic nationalism in the 1960s and early 1970s. For example, the very first Black Studies courses were likely African American history courses at Merritt College in Oakland, California. These courses were demanded by a student group that included Huey Newton, the future leader of the Black Panthers (Seale 1970). The explicit goal of the course was to teach Black history to Black Students and
promote a nationalist perspective. Later in 1968, at San Francisco State College, Black Studies courses were taught in ways that promoted a nationalist perspective. Eye witness accounts of the first Black Studies courses indicated that instructors often promoted nationalism (Rojas 2007: 61).

While some departments and institutions maintained a nationalist stance, many did not. As early as 1969, it was becoming clear to Ethnic Studies advocates that nationalism was not going to be a framework that would ensure integration into the university. At numerous campuses, Ethnic Studies proposals were rejected for being too political (Rojas 2007: 100-08). In other cases, autonomous Ethnic Studies institutions, like Nairobi College, disbanded because the constituency for them was too small (Van Deburg 1992). There simply weren’t enough people who were willing to donate money for a consciously nationalist and radical organization. The non-profit sector exerted significant pressure, as well. Philanthropic groups, such as the Ford Foundation, preferred to support Ethnic Studies programs that promised to teach integrated classrooms. Studies of Ford Foundation documents indicate that grant applicants were rejected if there were perceived as too “political,” a code word for nationalism (Rooks 2006; Rojas 2007).

In addition to rejecting nationalism as a legitimate justification for their field, Ethnic Studies scholars altered the content of their courses and texts. This isn’t to say that nationalism and other ideological perspectives are absent in modern Ethnic Studies. In fact, it is still possible to find prominent radical voices from every stand of Ethnic Studies. Molefi Asante developed “Afrocentric theory” in the 1980s as a response to the perceived shortcomings of Eurocentric scholarship (Small 1999; Asante 2006). Leonard Jeffries, advocate of “Nile Valley Scholarship,” argues that essential elements of classical Greek culture were first innovated in pre-Hellenic Egyptian societies (Jeffries 2011). Ward Churchill, the controversial former Ethnic Studies
professor, has defended violent resistance by indigenous peoples (see Churchill 2007). However, the typical Ethnic Studies program is staffed by scholars with traditional academic credentials and who approach Ethnic Studies in ways that would seem normal to their colleagues in related disciplines, which is apparent from quantitative data on African American Studies professors. Survey evidence shows that over 60% of African American Studies professors, for example, were jointly appointed in other departments (Rojas 2007: 190). Analyses of publication records of faculty in African American Studies doctoral programs show many scholars in elite universities tend to publish in disciplinary journals rather than Black Studies journals such as the Black Scholar (Rojas 2008).

The shift to interdisciplinary and value neutral scholarship might be linked to the drive for status in the academy. Chiang (2009) makes this claim with an analysis of the Asian American Studies field. Employing Bourdieuan sociology, Chiang notes that academia is a social system built around reputation and that success requires that professors obtain the right type of symbolic capital. Specifically, professors need ideas that will allow them to show superior technical and academic skills, not their allegiance to social movements. Therefore, Asian American studies, as a discipline, is ill served by an exclusive reliance on nationalist ideology, such as evaluating books in terms of relevance to the community, because nationalist frameworks provide few opportunities for intellectuals to demonstrate technical mastery of their discipline’s core methods. Asian American Studies “for the community” was simply not a viable way to acquire status in the academy.

Chiang’s analysis of Asian American Studies’ history illustrates the argument well. Like most other kinds of Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies was strongly associated with the student movements of the 1960s. The first proposals for Asian American Studies came out of the
Third World Strike at San Francisco State College, which also spawned African American Studies, Native American Studies, and Chicano Studies. Scholars were committed to a nationalist perspective in the field’s formative phase. The anthologies that defined the Asian American Studies canon, stated that their purpose was service to the Asian American community.

As time passed, the tenor of scholarship in Asian American Studies changed. Scholars began to focus on books that permitted a more technical, and thus more prestigious, approach to the field. One of Chiang’s examples is the book *Dictee*, written by California performance artist and poet Theresa Hyak Cha, an important book for a number of reasons. The book is written in a mixture of English, Korean, and French; it’s a book that mixes prose and poetry; and the volume combines text and visual arts. For these reasons, the book is often described as difficult and postmodern because it does not contain a traditional narrative or linear plot (Wong 1993).

Though it does reference colonial politics, it can’t be described as a conventional narrative of immigrant assimilation or political resistance. The text allowed Asian American Studies scholars to claim that their field had matured. Scholars were now producing readings of texts that were just as demanding as any associated with other kinds of literature. The expertise required to read and interpret *Dictee* exemplified the intellectual capital needed to help Asian American Studies grown into a more respected field.

**The Long 1970s**

An emerging theme is historical scholarship on the Civil Rights movement is the 1970s as a time of political retrenchment. After a relatively successful period, ranging from the mid-1950s to approximately 1968, Civil Rights groups scored a series of important victories, such as
the Brown decision (1955) and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Starting in 1968, there were visible signs that the Civil Rights movement was entering a new era. From the radical flank, nationalist organizations, such as the Black Panthers, captured national attention. At the same time, conservative groups formed, partially in response to the Civil Rights movement. The 1970s are seen as a time when liberal politics gave way to more radical tendencies while conservative groups made progress and formed winning electoral coalitions. Historians call this period, from 1968 to Reagan’s 1980 election, the “long 70s” and view it as a transitional period between a more liberal and conservative political climate (e.g., Cowie 2005; Strub 2008; Zanini 2010).

Ethnic Studies had to survive in this new environment and it is worth asking how the field’s deradicalization was tied to the shifting political climate. Historians have noted that the Third World Strike of 1968, the event originating modern Ethnic Studies, occurred during an election year when political candidate campaigned on a “law and order” platform. At that time, this was advantageous in the short term. Ethnic Studies proponents at San Francisco State College could portray themselves as an embattled, righteous group fighting for minorities. However, the acrimony of the late 1960s consumed liberal allies and encouraged opponents. The political environment became a liability because it resulted in a generation of administrators who were actively opposed to Ethnic Studies, some of whom worked to actively repress Ethnic Studies (Rojas 2010). As protest receded in the late 1970s, these administrators retained a cautious, often contentious, stance toward Ethnic Studies.

While the backlash and retrenchment of the 1970s is certainly important, it is by no means the only factor behind the abeyance and deradicalization of Ethnic Studies. For example, the 1970s were a time of economic crisis. Inflation decimated budgets and even the most enthusiastic university leaders found it hard to provide additional funds to Ethnic Studies. There
is also the issue of “protest cycles.” Coined by movement scholar Sidney Tarrow (1984), a protest cycle denotes the pattern of emergence, peaking, and decline experienced by a political movement. By the 1970s, the Civil Rights movement had gained its biggest victories and attention went elsewhere, it had reached the end of its cycle. In interviews with Black Studies professors, I have been told of the differences between the students of the early 1970s, who were politically engaged, and later cohorts who were more vocationally oriented. Finally, Ethnic Studies is but one field in a crowded university system with dozens of social science, humanities, and professional fields. Deradicalization may have been a way to reach out to more students in the competition for enrollments.

**The Uses of Ethnic Studies**

Ethnic Studies developed different relationships with the various audiences that constitute the American university system. At the highest levels, administrators did not support Ethnic Studies. Case studies of particular programs and historical accounts show that administrators ranged from ambivalent to hostile (Frye 1979; Cunningham 1991; Small 1999; Rojas 2007, 2010a). Before the Third World Strike, the event that began the modern Ethnic Studies movement, administrators initially supported proposals Black Studies and Ethnic Studies, but the academic programs were delayed in committees. The administrative delays strained relationships between students and deans, which contributed to the conflict. The Third World Strike settlement established Ethnic Studies, but there were still substantial conflicts between Ethnic Studies faculty and the administration. Tension and distrust characterized the relationship between Ethnic Studies programs and college administrators at many campuses.
The Ford Foundation, which funded many Ethnic Studies programs, published a report on Black Studies (Harris, Hine, and McKay 1990), which remains as one of the few extended discussions of administrators and their relationship to Ethnic Studies programs in the 1970s and 1980s. The report notes the hostility that many administrators feel because Ethnic Studies was brought to campus by protest. The report also notes that administrators tolerate Ethnic Studies for pragmatic reasons. Disbanding Ethnic Studies would lead to public outcry and these programs retained their symbolic value despite perceived shortcomings as an academic discipline. Administrators also thought that Ethnic Studies might help with campus diversity problems. A Black Studies unit, for example, was bound to bring African American scholars to the campus and showed that administrators cared about affirmative action and Black undergraduates.

Even though administrators have had a historically tense relationship with Ethnic Studies programs, there are moments when administrators have been more receptive. For example, in the early 1990s, administrators at Harvard University decided to rejuvenate their program, which had very low enrollments and a small staff (Rojas 2007: 116-27). The departing Dean of Arts and Sciences thought that Harvard’s Department of African and African American Studies deserved another chance at improving its reputation. This effort culminated in the hiring of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a well-established literary scholar, as department chair. A literary intellectual with an impeccable reputation, Gates quickly hired a cohort of high profile scholars, who became known at the “Harvard Dream Team” of African American Studies. Shortly thereafter, college administrators at other campuses initiated efforts to rejuvenate their Black Studies programs.

The 1990s boom in Ethnic Studies was not limited to African American Studies. A casual glance at Asian American Studies programs shows that they doubled their numbers in the 1990s,
from about twenty programs to nearly fifty. Other types of ethnic studies programs were created as well in recent years. Why did Ethnic Studies experience a renaissance of sorts in the 1990s? Perhaps the answer is generational. For decades, Ethnic Studies had been closely associated with student politics. It is possible for an academic field as a whole to acquire a stigma. By the 1990s, many hostile professors and administrators, who were present in the 1960s, began retiring and memories of protests faded. Thus, it was possible for sympathetic administrators to argue that it was time for a new push, and there was likely much less opposition. Once this happened in a prestigious institution like Harvard, Ethnic Studies could make gains at other institutions.

Research on Ethnic Studies units and instructors depicts a small, but embattled, field that has found a very specific niche. Data on unit staff size shows that Ethnic Studies programs tend to be small. The average degree granting African American Studies program has only seven professors (Rojas 2007: 3). Other Ethnic Studies units are smaller and, in some cases, they are bundled with other programs, such as American Studies. These programs rarely have graduate degrees and have heavy teaching undergraduate obligations. Ethnic Studies programs occupy narrow niches, unlike other generalist fields, like history, that attract large numbers of students. These units offer a few popular introductory courses, or multiculturalism requirements, which attract many curious students, but few enroll as majors.

Research also addresses how Ethnic Studies professors understand their own profession. For example, survey data indicate that African American Studies professors think that their field is independent of other fields and has unique methods, suggesting that Ethnic Studies has created a distinct professional culture (Rojas 2010b). These attitudes vary greatly by race, with little else correlating with these attitudes. The data do not explain why these differences exist, but it might be conjectured that Black professors feel a stronger personal attachment to the field or they have
had different professional experiences that White professors. The racial differences according to recent data seem to be disappearing (Rojas and Byrd 2011). The youngest White Africana Studies professors have begun to resemble their Black counterparts.

Another finding about African American Studies professors, which may be true about other kinds of Ethnic Studies, is that the typical professor has a joint appointment in another field (Rojas 2007: 190). As noted earlier, there are advantages to this strategy. A controversial area of study may need to justify itself by allying itself with more established areas. The cost of the strategy is that the cohort of professors in charge of the field may not have the luxury of devoting all of their time to Ethnic Studies. Collectively, these findings show that Ethnic Studies professors work in small academic, having appointments in multiple areas, and have a heightened professional identity.

Surprisingly, there is almost no research at all addressing the students enrolling in Ethnic Studies courses. Most research on Ethnic Studies students is historical and focuses on the central role students had in motivating Ethnic Studies (Rooks 2006; Nelson 2000). One of the few contemporary studies of Ethnic Studies pupils is a survey of African American Studies students at three large universities (Rojas and Shaffer 2009). The key finding is that students are attracted by the content of the course and the desire to acquire academic skills, while few report an interest in multiculturalism or more abstract justifications for African American Studies. The starkest finding is that students almost never hear about the course from other students, professors, or advisors. Africana Studies courses are disconnected from the social relationships that typically channel students into particular courses.
Despite pressures for conformity with the rest of academia, Ethnic Studies scholars still retain a radical, if qualified, stance. Ethnic Studies is an example of a “counter center,” an organizational space within a mainstream institution that embodies alternative discourse. Perhaps the most notable example is Temple University’s Department of African American Studies (Small 1999; Rojas 2007: 216-7). Established in the 1970s after student protest, Temple’s program developed into a center for afrocentric theory, which claims a distinctly African approach to knowledge. The program was the first offer doctoral degrees in 1983 and has hosted journals and conferences. Temple University remains a beacon for scholars interested in African American Studies that does not rely exclusively on other disciplines.

An important question is whether this position, an institutionalized oppositional stance, is sustainable in the years to come. More research must be done on this question, but there are some indications that the field will experience more pressures to de-radicalize. For example, recent research into the publications of Africana Studies professors in doctoral programs shows that there is a serious bifurcation of the field (Rojas 2008). Professors in Ivy League Africana programs tend to publish in disciplinary journals and almost never publish in the journals that define Black Studies, such as the Journal of Black Studies or the Black Scholar. Non-Ivy League faculty professors are much more likely to publish in the core Black Studies journals. This suggests that more elite programs are staffed by scholars with strong attachments to the traditional disciplines. Thus, one might expect that graduates of these doctoral programs will be trained by scholars who don’t share the view that Black Studies is about maintaining a radical voice in the academy.
Another issue is whether the people trained in the more distinctive doctoral programs, such as Temple, are continuing this tradition in other programs. If a doctoral student wrote a dissertation from an afrocentric perspective at the Temple University department, would they continue teaching and researching from an afrocentric perspective? If so, what impact do these scholars have? Will they be able to maintain African American Studies programs as radical spaces? Without more research, this question is nearly impossible to answer. But there are some indicators that things are changing. Survey data from Black Studies professors shows that more recent PhD graduates are less likely to think that their field is unique in comparison to other fields. They are less likely to assign radical texts, like Asante’s The Afrocentric Idea. Though more research is needed to assess these hypotheses, the preliminary evidence suggests that newer cohorts of Ethnic Studies scholar are more professionalized, which may change the field in the years to come.

**The Permanent Interdiscipline**

Ethnic Studies achieved its status with an interdisciplinary stance. The academy accepted Ethnic Studies if it promised that its main ideas would be tied to traditional disciplines. This section explores the consequences of an interdisciplinary strategy. What happens to an insurgent academic field if it is required to maintain a constant investment in other disciplines? What are risks involved with being a permanent interdisciplinary field?

One immediate consequence is that Ethnic Studies must draw its faculty from other related fields in the social sciences and humanities (Rojas 2007: 190). Since Ethnic Studies programs are usually undergraduate units whose courses are defined in terms of disciplines (e.g., the sociology of Black America), there are almost no “native” PhD holders. Most of the Ethnic
Studies professoriate is drawn from fields like history or sociology. About 6% of professors in African American Studies earned their doctoral degree from an African American Studies program (Rojas 2007: 186). Since there are only a handful of doctoral programs in other types of Ethnic Studies, there must be a similarly small number of PhD holders in fields like Native American Studies or Asian American Studies.

A second consequence of an interdisciplinary stance is a modest suppression of disciplinary solidarity. Analysis of survey data shows that African American Studies professors are less likely to believe that African American Studies is a field with its own distinct methods or ideas if they have a PhD in a social science discipline (Rojas 2007: 198). This correlation may be due to the fact that social science disciplines usually address ethnicity in some way. In contrast, many humanities fields are organized around canon, such as classic philosophers or great novelists, that until recently, included few works by ethnic minorities.

A third consequence of the interdisciplinary strategy is that Ethnic Studies has competing allegiances within the university. A majority of Ethnic Studies professors have PhD from outside the field. It is also true that a majority of faculty have joint appointments with programs outside of Ethnic Studies. That means that professors in Ethnic Studies units must often teach in other units, they have administrative responsibilities in other units, and they are often evaluated for tenure and promotion by professors in other units. The overall impact is that faculty members often have divided loyalties. This can appear in a number ways. The “other” department may require publication in different journals than those found in Ethnic Studies, which leads to promotion problems. In interviews with African American Studies professors conducted for my own research, it is not uncommon to claim a casual connection to their program and claim that they are “really” in some other field.
It is worth asking about the future of this interdisciplinary strategy. Avoiding the label of political radicalism was certainly useful for Ethnic Studies activists. But, as noted in other sections of this essay, Ethnic Studies now faces a different environment. There has been a renaissance of sorts and many administrators, in research institutions at least, have encouraged an expansion of Ethnic Studies. Even though the interdisciplinary strategy was useful during the creation of Ethnic Studies, there is little evidence suggesting that it remains useful. As noted above, a reliance on interdisciplinary scholars means that Ethnic Studies instructors have multiple loyalties in the university and a relatively weak attachment to the field. These tensions exacerbate promotion problems, and other issues, for professors (Cunningham 1991; Rojas 2007b).

The alternative is not clear. One option would be to recruit faculty from within the Ethnic Studies field. At the time of this writing, there are eight doctoral programs in African American Studies and only a few in other areas such as Asian American Studies. Collectively, these programs produce perhaps twenty PhD’s per year. Considering that there are approximately 900 tenure or tenure track faculty positions in African American Studies alone, it would take over forty five years to produce a professoriate composed entirely of Ethnic Studies doctorates. This estimate is very generous. It assumes that all graduates go into university teaching immediately and choose to teach in Ethnic Studies units, instead of related areas like American Studies.

This analysis suggests that Ethnic Studies might be served by other strategies. One approach might be to more closely integrate Ethnic Studies graduate training with existing doctoral programs. Rather than have autonomous doctoral programs, universities might have programs that require concurrent enrollment with other doctoral programs. This approach is taken at Yale University. It is not possible to obtain a doctoral degree only in African American
Studies. Graduate students must gain simultaneous admission to the African American Studies units and a second graduate program from a pre-selected list.

This hybrid approach to doctoral education in Ethnic Studies has a number of advantages that stem from being a program that meets halfway between the autonomous department and recruiting from existing disciplines. First, it guarantees that graduate students have an intense exposure to both an older discipline and Ethnic Studies. A graduate of this program will not be a recruit with a secondary interest in Ethnic Studies. Presumably, they will have a strong attachment to the field. A second advantage is that these programs require much less investment on the part of the university than a full-fledged doctoral program. If the university doesn’t have an existing African American Studies program, it can still have a dual doctoral program. Third, this type of program sends the signal that the university wishes African American Studies to have the same status as other departments. The dual program requires constant collaboration with other programs and graduates have the stamp of approval of two disciplines. It remains to be seen if this type of doctoral training will gain popularity.

**Ethnic Studies Spill Out**

Overall, the evidence suggests that the Ethnic Studies movement was a modest success as an autonomous institution. Ethnic Studies programs tend to be small and they have moved in a less political and more interdisciplinary direction. At the same time, it would be misleading to say Ethnic Studies didn’t have broader effects on the academy. To the contrary, Ethnic Studies had one very profound effect, which was to significantly expand the scope of debate in the humanities and social sciences by insisting that the history and culture of non-White ethnic
groups was worth studying (Bryson 2005; Rooks 2006). Among the affected disciplines, the humanities appear to have had a very strong engagement with Ethnic Studies. It is very common to find specialists in American ethnic literature in a wide range of departments. History programs have developed specialties in areas like African American or Native American history. Even philosophy, a very technical discipline, has scholars who study issues related to race, like nationalist political philosophy (Shelby 2007) and the nature of ethnic identity (Appiah 1993). The greatest triumph in the humanities for the Ethnic Studies movement may have been in the adoption of multicultural course requirements, which are often history or humanities courses.

Ethnic Studies has also spilled out into selected types of non-research universities. For example, one study found that Native American tribal colleges were more likely to have ethnic themed courses than predominantly White colleges and even historically black institutions (Cole 2006). These schools have ethnocentric courses not only in humanities disciplines, like history, but also in natural science areas. The argument offered is that Native American tribal colleges were created in the 1960s and 1970s, a time of heightened attention to race. For that reason, they have a distinctive culture that is particularly open to the politics represented by Ethnic Studies. This is not the case for White institutions or historically Black institutions, which were created in the late 1800s and early 1900s and retain ties to conservative religious groups.

The influence of Ethnic Studies on sympathetic disciplines and colleges is important, but it should not be overestimated. While many scholars may be sympathetic to the calls for more racially conscious education, Ethnic Studies has not become the dominant mode of academic thought in America. There is little evidence suggesting that a majority of scholars in the humanities disciplines have adopted Ethnic Studies. A routine examination of history department graduate programs, for example, shows that there are many programs offer specialization in
American ethnic history but that is one offering among many. Similarly, while American ethnic literature is a popular topic, there is no evidence that it has displaced other more traditional specialties in major journals. The Proceedings of the Modern Language Association carry numerous articles on ethnic literature while simultaneously publishing research on more canonical authors.

**Ethnic Studies as Educational Policy**

Most of this essay addresses Ethnic Studies answered questions about the development of the field. This penultimate section focuses on a different question: Did Ethnic Studies achieve its stated policy goals? Answering that question requires a discussion of what, exactly, did the activists of the 1960s intend when they demanded Ethnic Studies programs.

The politics behind Ethnic Studies were complex. As noted in the introductory portions of this essay, leading activists and scholars were often nationalists, which meant that they wanted these programs to serve the “community,” but they also viewed themselves as motivated by the civil rights movement, which was centered around racial harmony and integration. Ethnic Studies brought these two, often conflicting, tensions into the academy. From this perspective, Ethnic Studies has a mixed record. Deradicalization means that Ethnic Studies professors abandoned calls for single race classes and scholarship de-emphasizes distinctly racial perspectives. Few programs promise service to urban ethnic populations, meaning that the community mission has receded.

While ethnic nationalism has not succeeded in becoming established, and is thus an unsuccessful policy, there is the question of Ethnic Studies courses and their impact on students. One policy question is whether Ethnic Studies actually brings students of different ethnicities
together. Some scholars have noted the increasing number of White students and faculty in Ethnic Studies programs. This finding has led to some hand-wringing in the field, with observers wondering if Ethnic Studies programs might be viewed as a failure, or if the programs need a different mission for a new multicultural age (Rooks 2006). This response suggests that diversifying the student population in Ethnic Studies conflicts with the lingering image of Ethnic Studies as a service to minority students. At the very least, integrated Ethnic Studies classes have raised new, and important, questions about the purpose of the field.

The policy that speaks the most to the Civil Rights movement is the multicultural course requirement discussed in earlier sections of this essay. These courses may be the only exposure to Ethnic Studies that many students are likely to have. The question is whether enrolling in one or two undergraduate courses has a lasting impact. There is a substantial body of research claiming that students emerge from these courses with an enhanced sensitivity to racial issues and more inter-racial tolerance (e.g. Chang 2002; Hogan and Mallott 2005). The research on this topic does not follow students over the long term, nor are students who enrolled in multicultural courses compared with similar students who did not have to enroll in these courses, nor does the research does not take into account selection effects (i.e., more tolerant students enroll more often). For these reasons, there is no definitive answer to the question of whether multiculturalism courses are a policy with a strong and sustained impact.

**Conclusion**

The 1960s were about the clash of left social movements and more conservative institutions; the fight for Ethnic Studies was one battle in that war. What lessons can be drawn from that conflict? What conclusion should be drawn for students of liberalism in the academy?
First, institutionalizing politics as an academic discipline is a limited strategy. It’s hard to see how the history of Ethnic Studies can be cast in an unqualified triumphant light. The story of Ethnic Studies is one of constant compromise and limited impact. Even though Ethnic Studies acts as a “counter center” for radical voices, it is not usually seen as an entirely successful and widely accepted institutionalization of radical politics. The reason is that creating an academic discipline requires many intellectual and financial resources, which administrators are loath to give to self-described radicals.

Second, reframing the terms of debate in existing disciplines resulted in a notable level of success. As noted at numerous points in this essay, most humanities and social science fields have felt the impact of Ethnic Studies. Departments routinely offer courses that address American ethnic group, topics like Native American or Asian American history are now accepted specialties in many fields of study, and thousands of students now take diversity or multiculturalism courses. This reframing strategy is more successful because changing the content of courses and taking up new research topics doesn’t attract as much attention from outsiders and does not require much from academic administrators.

This book is dedicated to research on liberals in the academy and why so many professors have liberal politics. The story of Ethnic Studies addresses a different, but equally important topic, what happens when liberals mobilize and try to change the system? The contrast between Ethnic Studies as structural and intellectual change shows the complexity of politics in the academy. If liberals, or any other political group, intend to change higher education, they face a system that is at once highly stable and only occasionally susceptible to dramatic change. Should academic liberals ever decide to mount a challenge like they did in the 1960s, they will have to decide if subtle, intellectual change is worth the effort.
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