One

Introduction to Afrocentrism and Creationism, Challengers to Educational "Injustice"

In 1988, the District of Columbia public school system found itself perched on the edge of a controversy that would bedevil it for the next ten years. Although the issue would ebb and flow as the decade wore on, one superintendent lost his job over the controversy, and a great deal of ink was spilled, and vitriol expressed, in the local media over the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed plan. All of this discussion was activated by a proposal to infuse "African-centered" materials and methods of instruction into the local public school curriculum. The people who advanced the proposal argued that the district's curriculum was biased toward European knowledge and Western styles of teaching, and that this bias was harmful to the self-esteem and performance of African American school children. Proponents of Afrocentrism also complained that their views were not being represented within the district's official decision-making bodies, and that they were being denied a rightful voice in school policy. Community activists, Afrocentric scholars from across the nation, and parents of poorly educated children pushed the district to "go Afrocentric," while the majority of the city's resident media commentators, university faculty, and politicians pressured district leaders to reject the movement. Adding to the complexity, one faction of Afrocentrism's most vocal opponents lent their support to implementing a more "inclusive" *multicultural* curriculum in the district, while other opponents advised the district to reject all contemporary efforts to "balance" curricular content.

Charged with "race betrayal" by Afrocentrists if they did not incorporate Afrocentric materials into the curriculum, and with "spinelessness" by the opposing side if they did, district administrators faced decisions fraught with peril no matter which way they turned. Ultimately, the administration decided to implement what I call "circumscribed Afrocentric reform" in the district, which was an effort to conciliate both sides that ended up satisfying no one. To this end, the district instituted a school-within-a-school, "African-centered" program that served a miniscule 120 children out of some 80,000 in the district. The administration's solution won it few friends among either allies or opponents of Afrocentric reform, for it neither fully endorsed nor fully denounced the aims of the controversial Afrocentric movement. For this compromise solution, administrators

received withering criticism in the district and the nation, with the *Washington Post* leading the charge. Opponents condemned the superintendent and his staff for caving in to the demands of a radical fringe movement, and proponents of Afrocentrism castigated the superintendent for limiting the program to such a small scale, although they simultaneously praised him for even that level of support.

Another controversy over curriculum content that surfaced during this same general time took place in the state of California. Lasting from 1985 to 1989, this curriculum debate featured much of the same antagonistic rhetoric as the conflict over Afrocentrism in Washington, D.C. In a debate that concerned science-teaching statewide, challengers in the state of California argued that science curricula were biased and discriminatory, and that they, the challengers, had been excluded from the process of determining the content of public school instruction. The system, it seemed to them, had come under the control of a monopoly interest, and it was time to wrest power from this oppressive group. New curricula and materials had to replace the old dogmatic mode of instruction.

Although this sounds similar to the Afrocentric demands described above, the curricular content at the heart of the California debate was unlike the one Washington activists were fighting for. In California, Christian conservatives initiated the debate, charging that secular humanism had militated against truth in science classrooms, and that something immediate, and something fundamental, must be done to return schools to their more honest, Christian roots. They argued that alongside the teaching of evolution of human origins in science classes, there should rightfully be taught *creation science*, a "scientifically based" explanation of the biblical account of creation, in which a divine being created the earth, human beings, and all other species.

Over the past several years, I have examined three cases of Afrocentric challenge made to public school curricula, like the Washington case, and have compared them to four cases of creationist challenge, like the California case. All seven of the challenges that I studied occurred between 1980 and 2000. Like many other Afrocentric battles, the challenge in Washington arose in one of the nation's largest and poorest, predominantly African American school systems. Condemning public schools for shortchanging generations of their children, Washington D.C. supporters of Afrocentrism demanded that public schools rewrite their social studies and history curricula to emphasize the contributions made to U.S. and world history by Africans and African Americans. One of its specific solutions was to reorient African American children toward their African past, and also to honor the accomplishments of ancient black Egyptian culture—which is said to have lent so much of its teachings to Greek and Roman civilization. It was a movement that embraced black nationalism,

essentialism, and traditionalism—a form of conservatism that has long been one strain of African-American social and political thought.

Likewise, in many respects, the California creationist case was characteristic of other creationist battles being waged in the country during this time period, both in the demography of its supporters and in the claims they made. First, it was a challenge from the politically and socially conservative Right. Its proponents claimed that secular humanism and atheism—both of which, they argued, were based on a flawed evolutionary theory claimed as fact—had become established as a state religion in the public schools. One of the greatest abominations to morality, said creationists, was teaching evolution in science classrooms without also teaching "alternative theories" of life's origins. For creationists, evolution is not only biblically proscribed, but scientifically unproven, as well. Therefore, members of this group sought to loosen evolution's "dogmatic" grip on the imaginations of their children by having "honest" scientific evidence presented in the classroom, which casts doubt on Darwinian theory.

Seemingly incomparable on a number of dimensions—in terms of their sociopolitical ideologies, race, region, religion, and specific pedagogical objectives—these two groups of challengers, I will argue, were actually similar, and thus ideal for comparison, in a number of crucial ways.

First, at the most fundamental level, both Afrocentrism and creationism offered solutions to perceived social and educational problems—they were reform efforts to fix schools.[1] Each of these challenging efforts criticized the public education system for imposing its views on pupils and for placing enormous constraints on parents' ability to transmit their own belief systems to their children. Christian conservatives who supported creation science, for example, complained bitterly about secular humanists' monopoly of the education system, which was so powerful, they argued, that children's most profound beliefs were being trampled by administrators and teachers who held the reins of educational control. Similarly, Afrocentrists charged that an omnipresent Eurocentric curriculum has been forced upon their children, forming an oppressive environment that flagrantly has misrepresented Africans and African Americans and deemphasized historical racism.

Second, both challenges used the emotive force of their children's welfare to stake their claims for curricular change. As authors such as Nicola Beisel, and I, elsewhere, have demonstrated, there may be no more compelling social project than trying to protect children from various sorts of insidious harms.[2] Invoking their children as the prime beneficiaries of their action, Afrocentrists and creationists were remarkably alike.

A third similarity between the two was that both groups of challengers publicly insisted that their corrective to the education establishment's monopoly of the curriculum was to provide pluralism in the classroom, not

censorship. Since the 1960s, creationists have argued that they were fighting not to limit teaching—by ejecting evolution from the classroom—but rather, to have more content added to the curriculum, by teaching evolution and creation science alongside one another or, in a later version of their argument, by "exposing the weaknesses" of Darwinian theory. Such a solution, said the activists, is inclusive of everyone's beliefs, Christian and humanist. In a similar tone, Afrocentrists claimed that they did not seek to replace a Eurocentric curriculum with an Afrocentric one, for that would only repeat the miseducation of students and continue an arrogant disregard for other cultures.[3] Rather, national figures in the movement proposed to correct the misrepresentation of Africa in world history by adding previously slighted materials about the continent and its people and by ridding the school system of only the materials that are biased and white-centered.[4] Both groups of challengers represented their demands as inclusionary, not exclusionary.

Capping off this set of similarities was the fact that these challengers also faced considerable skepticism among a majority of educators—particularly administrators—in the school systems they battled.[5] Given the unorthodox tenets of each of these curricular movements, many administrators, dealing with their respective challenges, regarded these efforts to be politically risky, at best, and academically outrageous, at worst. While they invoked different cultural and institutional criteria to cast doubt on the two curriculum agendas, large numbers of education professionals were generally dismayed at being pressed to reform curricula along "nonscholarly" avenues: so that ancient black Egyptians could be presented as teachers to the Greeks, or so that the Bible could be used as the departure point for a scientific theory of origins. Whether these professionals were primarily motivated by a desire to protect their own positions by keeping change at bay, or to ensure that students be taught what they considered to be academically rigorous content, the majority of policymakers and administrators in systems challenged by Afrocentrism or creationism felt threatened by these challenges and wished that these issues had never arisen.

In sum, although the two campaigns for curricular change were substantively different in their learning objectives, they also shared many common features. Afrocentrists and creationists felt disenfranchised from public schools, and they used remarkably similar rhetoric in their fights over curricula. Both issued a critique of schools' content, and they demanded similar concessions: they claimed that students were discriminated against when they were forced to accept the teachings of an oppressive educational system, and they proposed their own scholarly correctives to this crisis. Both challenges, as we shall see in later chapters, can even be thought of as the same type of "identity movements" in educa-

tion,[6] and their proponents viewed as representatives of "discursive politics,"[7] in that their goals seem to have been aimed more at creating new understandings about educational processes—and at achieving respect and status for their group in educational decision making—and less toward ensuring measurably improved academic achievement on the part of their children. And finally, when each group of challengers presented its goals to education officials, a majority of those professionals was skittish about incorporating revisions into the curriculum.

So, what came to pass in these targeted school systems, given the similarities in challengers' objectives and educators' reactions to those demands? What I have found in comparing these two challenges is that, following from their skepticism, school personnel delivered fundamentally the same *ultimate* fate to Afrocentrists and creationists: they fought to preserve their institution's core curricula in history and science. Aided sometimes by the courts and sometimes by public opinion, school staff eventually rebuffed both sets of challenges, so that little, if any, of either Afrocentrists' or creationists' initial curricular demands had serious lasting or widespread effects on students' classroom learning. Fighting to maintain the essence of their "technical core," school personnel ultimately staved off these demands for curricular reforms.

But there is more to the story. What I have found so interesting about the two similar ultimate outcomes in these cases is that professional educators figured out ways to rebuke each challenge using a *different* repertoire of strategies, which resulted in short-term outcomes that varied on multiple dimensions. When confronted with Afrocentrists' demands, school officials generally treated their challengers more respectfully than they did creationists; they appeared to consider Afrocentric demands as legitimate matters to be deliberated; and they allowed Afrocentric proposals for revised curricula onto their official agendas (if not always into their official curricula). In two of my three cases, Afrocentrists were even able to make real headway into school-district educational practices and to change the official history and social studies curricula taught there—at least temporarily. But I soon discovered that a school system's initial apparent respectfulness toward Afrocentric challengers should not be confused with its willingness to grant lasting accommodation. In each of the three Afrocentric cases, school systems eventually watered down whatever Afrocentric victory had been gained in the contested school system, delivering considerably less concrete change to Afrocentric activists than they had initially promised. I call this a process of gradual dilution. While Afrocentrists may have won a few battles, they ultimately won no wars.

Nor did creationists win any lasting wars, although school system professionals used a different process from "dilution" to thwart their Christian conservative challengers. When confronted by creationists, educators

came out with their fists swinging. There was no initial accommodation, which was then blunted by a watering down process. Professional educational leaders were simply unwilling to accommodate their creationist critics. Despite the fact that the Christian conservative reformers, too, were making claims of bias and discrimination, in all four of the creationist cases studied in this book, the education establishment—by which I mean professional educators in positions of authority—lined up far more forcefully against their creationist challengers than their counterparts did against their Afrocentric challengers. With the backing of such organizations as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Academy of Sciences, school system officials argued that anti-Darwinist, creationist curricula crossed the line that separated church from state, and they fought tooth-and-nail to defeat their creationist foes.

Now, it is true that creationists, in three of the locations I studied, got themselves elected to school boards or legislative bodies with the support of committed voters, and that they sometimes could muster truly impressive political power to impose temporary creationism-friendly law in their school systems (we will see evidence of these advances in chapters 5 and 6). But when creationists did this, education professionals—people who were trained in education schools, who held educational credentials, and who felt that they should have the authority to make decisions in the system—bitterly opposed them. These official educators could wield institutional power, and they fought back mightily and publicly against creationists' gains from the very beginning of the contests. They did this even when creationists had gained access to the inside of those systems—such as by being elected to serve on the school board. When they fought back (and they always did), professional educators' institutional power trumped creationists' political power. Creationists were unable to parlay their early elective and political gains into positive ultimate outcomes for their side. In each and every occasion that a public school system temporarily "went creationist," eventually some type of public backlash, whether by voters or by the courts—but always encouraged by education professionals—reversed those gains. Time and again, creationists tasted victory, only to have schools (or voters, on behalf of schools) take it away from them painfully and publicly.

Like the Afrocentrists, then, creationists were unable to attain lasting, concerted change in the school systems they challenged. Afrocentrists gained some concessions, but educators found ways to make their concessions temporary—often by surreptitious or, at least, behind-the-scenes, means. Creationists, meanwhile, also were sometimes able to seize political power in school systems, but they, too, were eventually defeated, although in the creationists' case, the defeat was trumpeted publicly. In both cases, but by different routes, schools were able effectively to mini-

mize their challengers. It is to both the similarity in these challenges and their variance that this book will be addressed.

Consequential Challenges?

What does this matter? Should we care if Afrocentrists and creationists traveled different routes to ultimately similar fates in these seven school systems? Is it important that Afrocentrists were, generally, more effective than creationists in their efforts to claim legitimacy for their ideas and to get those ideas on educators' agenda—at least initially—while creationists' arguments fell on relatively deaf ears? Should our interest also be piqued by the fact that even in Afrocentrists' encounters with educators—where school officials went so far as to praise and even, sometimes, implement policy in their favor—that their efforts ran into eventual obstacles to real change? As subtle as those obstacles to Afrocentric reform may have been, they were still heady, and professional educators were primarily responsible for constructing them. Should we be interested to observe that the obstacles that creationists confronted, on the other hand, were not subtle in the least, and that education bureaucracies, in fact, loudly announced their antipathy toward this set of challengers? The question I am raising is this: even if we grant that studying Afrocentrism and creationism might be interesting in an ethnographic sense, can the outcomes of their challenges teach us anything about social processes that sociologists care about in a more general sense? Can they tell us, in order of ascending institutional magnitude, anything important about feelings of alienation among individuals in challenger movements; about contentious challenges in public schools; about the dynamics of open conflict in large institutions, generally; or even about everyday life in late twentieth-century America? Or were the Afrocentric and creationist challenges just two fringe curricular reform efforts, among many, that occurred on the margins of American pedagogical life and that can tell us nothing newsworthy about our lives in large institutions or about sociological theory?

Not surprisingly, given the book-length attention I devote to these challengers and to the responses they received from school systems, I argue that these challenges did matter, and I will make the case that exploring marginal challenges such as Afrocentrism and creationism, and the outcomes they achieved in schools, can reveal a great deal not only about the racial or religious frustration, respectively, that some groups of citizens experience in public schools in contemporary America, but also about the dynamics surrounding challenge activities in the United States—especially in public schools—and the ways in which organizations like school sys-

tems respond to challenges from their different constituencies. The main thrust of the argument is that these school systems managed to absorb protest, to quell institutional change, when either creationists or Afrocentrists were on the frontlines. It was not that Afrocentrists won stunning victory in case after case while creationists suffered humbling defeat; or, conversely, that creationists achieved brilliant success while Afrocentrists were sent away by school systems with no gains. There is no single "success metric" that can account for the outcomes realized in these two different challenges. But by looking at the two challenges in depth—both in comparison to each other, and individually, for each of the seven cases— we can see why and how outcomes developed in the schools as they did. In general, Afrocentrists were better able to get American educators to consider their requests and treat their complaints as valid, which illustrates that some cultural discourses about bias have greater power to resonate with American understandings (at least American *educators'* understandings), while others are not so endowed. Creationists, meanwhile, often took advantage of voter disinterest in their communities, and collected enough ballots on election day to win majorities on school boards. These events indicate that a structure of political opportunities in any given institution may be beneficial to some challenging groups but not to others. Finally, in the case of both Afrocentrists and creationist challenges, we will see that the presence of organizational routines in large institutions like public schools are sometimes helpful, but often injurious, to challengers. At a more abstract level, studying events such as these seven challenges might prepare us to make better predictions of when challengers will be able to push embattled institutions to change their ways of doing things and, alternately, when these institutions will be able to stay their course, dispensing, one way or another, with their adversaries. These are issues that occupy the highest order of theorizing in the sociological discipline, and they emerge visibly in this comparison of little respected, much vilified education challenges.

Understanding Outcomes

The Meanings of these Challenges: Cultural Analysis of Afrocentric and Creationist Efforts

As I began investigating these seven Afrocentric and creationist challenges, seeking clues to what they might be about, their ground-level activities seemed important from many theoretical angles.

From my home branch of cultural sociology, I sought to make sense of the two fascinating challenges using a sort of *cultural analysis*, in which

the meanings of the challenges would emerge front-and-center as provocative aspects of the conflicts to be studied. How were Afrocentrists, as challengers to schools, different from creationists? How were they similar in surprising ways? Some of the most absorbing issues arising from a culturally sensitive look at these challenges include questions about the way these groups defined themselves as people with legitimate claims, and then presented their demands for change to multiple audiences; how they constructed identities for themselves vis à vis others in the challenging field (such as Afrocentrists against multiculturalists, and creationists against advocates for prayer in the schools); and how they used particular forms of language in their claims making. I decided to look at the identities that both camps forged for themselves, that they applied to their foes, and that they reserved for their supporters. I tracked the values, practices, and norms that prevailed in each challenge, that bound members to one another, and that kept other groups, with other practices and values, defined as the "enemy."[8] I investigated the lines of distinction that separated these groups' members from others in schools; I explored their academic experiences and credentials, their occupational locations in the academic world, and their presence on the country's historical stage. Chief among this line of questioning is an analysis of each group's written and spoken discourses: how they presented their ideas about children, justice, and America to themselves and to other audiences. In the words of cultural sociology, I studied the ideational and symbolic elements of Afrocentrists' and creationists' claims about schools, and schools' ideational and symbolic responses to their critics. Central to this area of study were questions surrounding the challengers' use of rhetoric, and the degree to which their "framing" of the issues resonated with and, perhaps, even changed the wider cultural discourses of the day.

Because a study of these challenges would be desiccated without an understanding of the groups' cultural foundations, I launch the book with an examination of this type. The exploration focuses particularly on the claims each group of challengers made about its position in American educational and social life, and the counterclaims that other institutional sectors (such as the media and political actors) issued in response.

But although a cultural analysis of these challengers leads to important insights into what it was like to be a marginal curricular movement in the United States in the last years of the millennium, it cannot capture the entirety of these groups' experiences in the schools. There is more to Afrocentrism and creationism than the meanings they sought to alter in schools, the identities they crafted, and the rhetoric they used to state their demands. As David Tyack and Larry Cuban indicate in *Tinkering toward Utopia*, challengers' claims do not fall into a black hole where no one hears them. In the examples studied here, Afrocentrists and creationists

advanced their arguments in organizational and political settings, where people in positions of power had the authority to do something about those claims. I found it necessary to examine the various ways that education professionals approached these two sets of challengers, and to look at the consequences that resulted from that varying reception.

Challenges as Social Movements

My study of the seven Afrocentric and creationist efforts continues, then, with intellectual wrestling of a different kind, when I turn to a *social movements* approach for exploring the dynamics and outcomes of these challenges. The area of social movements and collective action is the longtime home of sociological research into protest activism and other "weapons of the weak." Social movements researchers have developed a useful tool kit of concepts that can be applied to Afrocentrists' and creationists' organization of their resources, their mobilization of adherents to their causes, their strategies of culturally "framing" their issues, and their attempts to exploit the political opportunities that resided in their school systems, while also skirting the political constraints that lurked there.

Given the explicit rhetoric of injustice that each set of challengers used, social movements research beckoned for a role in the examination of these school battles. In their sense of having been excluded from the public school system, in their claims of inequity, in their collective identity as people struggling for the rights of their children, and in their sense of efficacy in being able to correct these multiple wrongs, Afrocentrists and creationists sounded very much like "social movements" that struggle against entrenched institutions. Although Afrocentrists and creationists were equipped with only a smattering of material assets and organizational know-how (instead benefiting mostly from cultural resources), and despite the fact that they targeted only the more limited organization of school systems (and not the state, at large), and even though they took their causes directly to school authorities (rather than to a mobilizable public), on a variety of other dimensions, Afrocentrists and creationists looked a great deal like other groups that traditionally have been studied as social movements. The lessons learned from the study of a host of other movements—from prohibition to civil rights—I thought, could be applied to the project of understanding the two groups' experiences in schools.

Applying a social movements analysis to these challenges, however, required some adaptation of movements theory—an adaptation that, I believe, will contribute to an emerging synthesis in the area of political sociology, which is exemplified in the theoretical work of Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly.[9] For one, it has been argued that we

now live in a world where movement-like contention has become far more frequent than it was just thirty years ago, and that the kinds of struggles that Afrocentrists and creationists were waging from 1980 to 2000 have become the modal form of contentious politics in Western democracies.[10] Unlike the social movements that have inspired mainstream social movements theory—large, political, and disruptive challenges such as the civil rights, pro-life, or environmental movements—the kinds of struggles that have become far more common in Western societies in the past few decades are generally local rather than national movements; they take place within institutions rather than "in the streets"; and they target institutional power rather than what is ordinarily considered to be "political" power. Analyzing creationism and Afrocentrism using a social movements lens acknowledges a willingness to think more broadly about what we mean by the term "movements."

Second, tapping the social movements literature for insights into what, exactly, Afrocentrists and creationists were able to accomplish in the schools—that is, their outcomes—yielded surprisingly mixed results. Until recently, movements researchers have spent relatively little energy trying to understand challenger outcomes. As much as the study of movement origins and trajectories has become something of a growth industry in the field, according to some scholars, the *effectiveness* and the *outcomes* of those challenges have remained more obscure, due to researchers' comparative inattentiveness in this area. Because so much research effort has flowed toward questions of movement formation and emergence, some scholars argue,[11] we have few keys for understanding the conditions and circumstances that led to the eventual rebuke of both Afrocentionists and creationists, the processes leading to their temporary success and failure, or the actual effects gained by either movement. We are even less prepared to know why subject bureaucracies (the organizations being challenged) respond positively or negatively to their challengers' demands, how they deliver certain kinds of victories and defeats, or about their very ability to accommodate Afrocentrists' and creationists' claims.[12] While education scholars such as Larry Cuban and David Tyack have studied this question of reform outcomes from the perspective of education policy,[13] few movements researchers have studied the subject organization as a possible source of outcome variation. This is a wide gap in knowledge, which, though beginning to attract important and interesting study for other types of institutional challenges, leaves a fairly open path for understanding what happened in the Afrocentric and creationist challenges.

Following this path, I have found three prominent concepts already developed in movements research to be useful for studying the two challenges' outcomes in school systems, even if these concepts to this point have been marshaled only rarely to study the results of institutional strug-

gles. The first of these three ideas is *framing*, the rhetorical activity that movement leaders use to try to connect their arguments about a set of issues to audiences' common-sense understandings about those same issues. When successful, movements' framing activities result in "frame resonance," whereby an audience "buys into" the logic of the movement. The second social movements concept that has guided my thinking about Afrocentrists' and creationists' outcomes is the concept of *insider / outsider* location in the challenged field, a measure of different actors' access to the routine structures of power in a system. The third concept is the traditionally structural factor of *political opportunities and constraints*, or the economic, political, and social variables that exist at the time of a challenge and that characterize the windows of opportunity for challenger emergence and formation in an embattled institution.[14] These three ideas—laid out in their most abstract form here—cover the cultural and structural terrain usually described in movement studies: specifically, the cultural ties that challengers forge with audiences using rhetorical strategies, and the structural opportunities that arise in the field (negative and positive) affecting challenger activity. And yet, as currently understood, the three concepts have not been put to full use to theorize outcomes and, so, cannot capture the varied results that Afrocentrists and creationists realized in these seven cases. In later chapters I will trace in greater detail the intellectual foundations of these ideas, but for now, I will highlight only the extensions to these movements concepts that the study of Afrocentric and creationist challenges can make.

FRAMING. According to scholars who study framing, movement leaders produce and employ frames that will legitimate their goals and tactics, maximize the public's attention to and support for the movement, and defuse and preempt counterframing by the movement's opponents. Applied to these two challenges, framing raises the central question, How did the leaders of the creationist and Afrocentric challenges try to marry their arguments about oppression in the schools with their audiences' understandings and values about education, justice, and other related issues? As many movements researchers have described, challenging movements use framing techniques in a number of ways: to *diagnose* some problem that they believe needs attention (that is, to indicate events or conditions as problematic); to give a *prognosis* of what should be done about the problem (to indicate the solution to these unjust conditions); and finally, to solidify the *identities* of the various sides in a challenge, defining who rightly belongs on the side of justice and who does not (to draw boundaries between "us" and "them").[15]

In most studies that discuss framing, movements researchers have looked at challenge leaders' efforts to link their preferred frames with the

frames of a mobilizable public, and to study whether the movement is able to "resonate" with that public's values and beliefs to spur citizens to action. But, far fewer movements scholars have studied the direct effect of challengers' frames on the very organizational members they are trying to sway—*establishment insiders*—and to ask why it is that some challenger frames have the power to compel actors who seem ideally situated to reject challenger arguments. Framing's direct persuasive connection with organizational decision makers has received little consideration largely because so little movements research has focused on smaller institutional challenges in a particular organization (like schools) where public mobilization may not be so effective, and also partially because researchers assume that challengers have little influence on power holders. Movements scholars have paid only scant attention to the ways that challengers may frame issues to persuade institutional incumbents, in addition to movement participants and bystanders, of the justice of their cause.[16]

And yet, as I will be demonstrate throughout the book, it is costly to overlook this realm of framing activity and potential resonance if we are to understand the outcomes in the seven Afrocentric and creationist cases. Professional educators' vulnerability to framing techniques varied significantly across these two challenges, with Afrocentrists' claims leading to greater frame resonance with educators' cultural understandings than creationists' frames were able to achieve. When Afrocentrists diagnosed a problem in American education pertaining to young African Americans' historical and present poor performance in substandard schools, they were pitching their arguments directly to school power-brokers, and their arguments resonated with some. When they recommended a solution that involved the incorporation of Afrocentric concepts, the "fix" they proposed was directed to those in decision-making positions. The solution may have seemed extreme to many professionals in the schools, but to others (even those with enormous amounts of authority in these systems), the solution seemed not too far a cry from multiculturalism—a form of curriculum that had grown familiar and expected in schools. When Afrocentrists warned that those who turned their backs on the challenge were "racist," the frame was meant to raise pronounced fear in educational quarters, and it was often successful. These appeals to professional personnel, as we will see, resulted in some resonance with educators, and ultimately assured Afrocentric challengers at least some voice in the curriculum discussions in the three school systems. In contrast, a lack of resonance with professional educators handicapped the creationist challenge.

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS. Acknowledging that there may be additional targets of challengers' framing activities, besides just a mobilizable public, brings forth another prominent issue in movements research that is useful

for the study of Afrocentrists' and creationists' varying outcomes in the systems they challenged. This issue concerns the "inside" and "outside" locations of various actors on the challenging field. As suggested above, if we direct our attention to the right spots, we can see that Afrocentric and creationist frames may appeal to the latent—and sometimes even to the explicit—values of decision makers located *within* school systems. When this happens, we should recognize that education professionals—like policymakers, administrators, and teachers—may go along with challengers' goals in ways totally unanticipated by scholars. Theorized by most movement researchers to be always oppositional to challenge efforts, "insiders," on occasion, may believe in the frames that their challengers advance, and they may not always act to defend their organizations from external pressure. They may even, sometimes, act directly on behalf of those challengers, as they did in two of my cases. Or, at the very least, they may choose not to throw roadblocks in challengers' way.

Although some in the social movements literature, like Sidney Tarrow, have cautioned us to expect that insiders will act in the interest of challengers only when it is politically expedient or helpful to the insiders' own careers,[17] data from these seven cases will suggest that there are exceptions to this rule. Sometimes challenger arguments actually persuade professional insiders; sometimes, in fact, insiders work alongside challengers to move their organizations toward change. The relationship between challenger frames and the persuadability of insiders, I believe, has thus far been undertheorized in the social movements literature, and the subject will have to take a more pronounced spot on the research agenda if we are to understand how many challenge events actually unfold—particularly, perhaps, in institutional arenas.[18]

Related to this question of insider persuadability is the question of who constitutes an "insider" in challenges like these, in the first place. "Insiders" have long been considered to be those members of the polity, or institution, who have regular access to decision-making resources. "Outsiders," on the other hand, are those who lack such access. Using these terms, we would assume that both Afrocentrists and creationists were outsiders placing demands on insiders since, by common definition, contentious politics occur only when some faction lacks access to decision-making authority in the first place. But events in this study suggest that we should reconsider the rigid line that has been drawn to separate so-called "organizational insiders" from "challenging outsiders." Two of many examples from my data can be used to recommend a reexamination of this type. In one of the locations I studied where Afrocentrists demanded changes in school curricula, I discovered the following unexpected scenario (unexpected from a social movements perspective, anyway): it was the *superintendent of schools*—and not "outside"

constituents—who led the charge for Afrocentric reform in his district, having been convinced by a prominent Afrocentric scholar at a nearby university, among others, that such change was necessary for the benefit of children. Fighting *against* the superintendent in this case, were members of his own administration, members of the board of education, and many teachers—particularly white teachers—in the district. Fighting *alongside* the superintendent were parents from a small community group called the Shrine of the Black Madonna. According to rigid definitions, does the superintendent fit the role of an "insider" or an "outsider" in this challenge? If we have only these two options to choose from, we would miss much of the cultural resonance, structural alliances, and important nuance that occurred in the Atlanta case—and many other challenges, I suspect. In a second example involving two of the creationist cases described in this book, movement leaders (routinely known as outsiders because they were marginalized as legitimate voices in school decision-making) were elected to official seats on state and local school boards, putting them in position to enact creationism-friendly policies in their districts. But in both of these cases, members of the professional education staff in these school systems, administrators and teachers who had been hired or appointed to their positions years earlier, worked tirelessly to oust the pro-creationist school board members and reverse their conservative impact on the curriculum. Were the creationism-friendly, duly-elected school board members insiders or outsiders? If we considered them simply to be outsiders, how could we account for their power to implement policy as members of the elected board? If we counted them as insiders, conversely, how would we explain, first, their inability to convince professional education staff of the legitimacy of their policies and, second, their ultimate failure to institutionalize "anti-Darwin" instruction in the systems where they held power?

I will argue that research has suffered when the field of contention is divided like this into two hermetically isolated, dichotomous categories— "inside" vs. "outside"—when data often do not warrant such a sharp division. And our understanding of Afrocentrists and creationists is jeopardized, too, if we cling to this strict division of movement actors. The tendency to divide has attenuated our understanding of the links that may exist between "insiders" and "challengers" in any given site, whether those links are built on shared cultural assumptions (as was the case in the first example, where the superintendent in Atlanta believed in the Afrocentric movement's goals), or divergent structural locations in a school system (as was the case in the second example, where school board members in two of my cases aligned with creationist groups to challenge science teaching). The sharp divisions between "challengers," on the one

hand, and "elites," on the other—to use different terms for the same concepts—is an oversimplification of the real world of contentious politics.

So, one of the goals of this book is to flesh out the kinds of relationships that exist between "insiders" and "outsiders" in contentious struggles and to go beyond the line that has been drawn to divide the two sides so neatly. This one particular task of the book has been made lighter by the heavy lifting that has come before in this area, as a few other writers in sociology and political science have also problematized this division. In *Faithful and Fearless*, for example, political scientist Mary Katzenstein has demonstrated that "insiders" have often aided and abetted "outside" challengers in two American institutions—the military and the Catholic Church; and in a forthcoming manuscript, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly reconsider the roles that the once-labeled "polity members" and "challengers" play in challenger outcomes.[19] Although the points of entry into this terrain may differ from my own, I have found it very fruitful to situate my arguments in this new area of political and sociological theory on movements and to try to add back to its insights.

Afrocentrism and Creationism: Contentious Challenges

What can be discovered by extending a social movements analysis to these two groups of challengers? Here were two highly marginalized contests in schools—hardly the typical site of protest that we are accustomed to conjuring up when we hear the term "social movement," as noted earlier in this chapter. Neither Afrocentric nor creationist struggles were highly disruptive. They did not involve mass mobilization, and they were not aimed against narrowly defined state power.[20] But they can tell us a great deal about how challengers often wage battles against authority in today's world and, in so doing, they can contribute to a body of work that is now emerging on contention. The study of social movements is broadening these days to become a more inclusive study of contentious politics in a wide variety of social fields—whether the conflict is occurring traditionally at the level of the state, in smaller subunits of the state (in public school systems, for instance, as in challenges like these two), within private organizations (in the fight for domestic partners policy in corporations, for instance),[21] or against large public institutions (such as gay rights activism in the military). Scholars are realizing that in today's Western society, contention has become more common, particularly at the local level.

Not only that, but the old duality between "interest groups" (those groups working within the pluralist system) vs. "social movements" (those working on the political margins, or at the extremes of conven-

tional political structures) is collapsing, according to several leading movements scholars.[22] The understanding of contentious politics, in other words, is being expanded to include any occurrences where (1) there is a system of institutionalized power in place, (2) there are power holders within that system who wish to maintain power, and (3) there are other actors in the field who are relatively powerless, and who contest the power of seated authorities.

While adding to this literature on contentious politics, I have also found that studying challenges to an institution beneath the level of the state (and not to the state itself) can sensitize us to an arena of factors that is seldom commented on in the broader social movements literature, but which, I argue, should be analyzed in depth. Because states—the de rigueur locus of social movements research into challenges—are normally seen to revolve around issues of *political* power, scholars in the social movements field traditionally have trained their sights mostly on the political aspects of challenge dynamics. While this may make sense epistemologically, the consistent emphasis on the political power of state regimes has led movements researchers to neglect other sites of power, such as the organizational power of established institutions to fend off challengers. Or, so I will argue. Institutions rely not only on their political bases of control, I hope to show, but also on the organizational routines that give them authority. Recentering the analysis around targeted institutions other than those with political authority—like around schools, a subunit of the state—allows organizational features to emerge as important factors in outcomes. These are factors that I think should be studied more closely and that can contribute enormously to the field of contentious politics, an argument that I will introduce in the next section of this chapter and revisit throughout the next several chapters.

Finally, looking more locally at challenge, rather than at just national protest activity, also gives us insight into processes that otherwise get overlooked in our studies of the cultural zeitgeist. If one were concentrating on national protests surrounding public school curricula from 1980 to 2000, for example, one would probably be led to believe that conservative issues received a much warmer reception during this time. After all, twelve of these years occurred during the conservative Reagan-Bush era, and the other eight were subsumed by a reconstructed Democratic leadership that also touted many conservative values. Organized school prayer, the posting of the Ten Commandments in school rooms, back to basics, the "protection" of marriage as a symbol for our children, and the return of family values, generally—these and other traditional ideas enjoyed a good deal of support from leaders at or near the top of the nation's political structure during these decades. Should creationism not have been greeted with at least some tolerance by educators, given this political environment, and

should Afrocentrism not have suffered much more of a pariah status, given its far distance from these national political hot-button issues? We might conclude so if we chose to restrict the study of contentious politics to only those challenges that reached the national stage. But what I have found in studying these seven school systems in the East, West, North, and South is that more locally based political and social movements often diverge from national trends, and that if we want to know about protest, we have to look at local settings, as well.

What all of this means is that there is much to be gained from analyzing Afrocentrism and creationism—and the responses each received from school systems—using the concepts developed by scholars in the social movements area. And the study of marginal curriculum challenges can also add back to the subfield.

Schools as Organizations

As the study of these challenges has been laid out thus far, I will look, first, at the Afrocentric and creationist movements from a cultural perspective, and I will map the ideational and symbolic aspects as they existed in the two intellectual movements. Second, I will examine the challenges using a social movements, or contentious politics, approach, aimed at describing both the rhetorical resources the challenges were able to muster in their respective struggles with school systems and the political opportunities they encountered there. Along the way, I will describe how the targets of Afrocentrists' and creationists' framing activities were broad enough to include organizational "insiders" like superintendents, teachers, and school board members, not just members of the public. I also will give evidence suggesting that the challengers themselves may hold positions inside the school system. This means that the line between "insiders" and "outsiders" is fuzzier than scholars have previously assumed.

Having now suggested that institutional insiders may be an additional set of challenger targets (as well as challenge initiators), it becomes important to examine more closely the *organizational dynamics* that these challengers confronted when they staked their claims in schools. What cultural expectations did professional educators hold concerning challengers' rights to make demands? Which conditions caused some school districts to be vulnerable to challenge while others were not? How did schools seek to handle their challengers under various circumstances? What we should gather from the posing of these questions is that no matter what kinds of resources and opportunities the Afrocentric and creationist challengers could assemble on their own behalf, they were never in complete control of their resources' performance in the organizational

field where they battled. As one researcher, Kelly Moore, has written, the actions of protesters are only one determinant of social movement outcomes. Equally important are the characteristics of targets.[23] Another way of putting this is to say that challengers' actions do not get made in an organizational vacuum, where all school systems, say, are equivalently structured, and respond to all challenging acts in like manner or by like means. On the contrary, school systems are home to myriad organizational structures and cultures of their own, and these practices, routines, and beliefs, too—in addition to challengers' own resources—contribute to the success of challengers. As much as we can ever say about the influence that discursive and political environments might have on Afrocentric and creationist outcomes, it won't be enough until we also analyze the organizational practices that exist in the school systems they are challenging—especially the daily routines governing administrators' actions that challengers confront. Having analyzed the movements qua movements, that is to say, we should then turn the question around and analyze how schools, as long-standing organizations, responded to these challenges—a method that provides a complement to an emphasis on challengers.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT. How should we "turn the question around" and consider these challenges from an organizational perspective? To make sense of Afrocentric and creationist outcomes, I will draw on two areas of recent theory that help highlight the effects of organizational routines and practices on challenging movements, generally, and on these African American and Christian conservative challenges, particularly.

The first area I will tap directs our attention to the fact that organizations, such as the school systems where Afrocentrists and creationists made demands for change (or the military, the Church, corporations, the federal government, or any other organizational entity, for that matter), can be chaotic places, where supporters of one goal may be in conflict with supporters of another goal and both, meanwhile, may be aligned against the goals of a third faction. Organizations are not the unitary, purposive, rational entities that so much of the social movements literature depicts them to be. Typically imagined by social movements researchers to be a wall of unified opposition against which challengers constantly butt their heads, organizations can be viewed differently. Organizations are frequently messy decision makers, typified by contentiousness in "group relations, departmental conflicts, and career frustrations," as Walter Powell has written.[24] In other words, the seemingly stable organizations with which challengers are so often depicted to be doing battle are much more likely to be conflict-ridden entities, to some greater or lesser extent. Contentiousness is a hallmark of organizational experience, in

fact, and many scholars who study organizations have begun documenting not only contention, but even challenger-like activities inside these once-perceived bastions of calm.[25]

In a similar vein, education policy researchers have documented internal conflict as a permanent fixture among school system insiders. In fact, school systems are organized around the very fact of countervailing interests and goals. David Tyack and Larry Cuban differentiate between three levels of education insiders: lay policymakers, who are elected and sometimes appointed to school boards; administrators, who have professional degrees and work in the bureaucratic offices of school systems; and practitioners, particularly teachers, who instruct in the classroom.[26] Distinguishing among these three different levels, and bearing in mind that each of them often has its own distinct interests, values, and practices that potentially conflict with each other, is a strong corrective to assuming singular goals and consensus within targeted organizational ranks.

Why is the reality of conflict important, and why have movements studies largely neglected its presence? Answering the first question is easier than accounting for the second. I will argue that organizations research and education policy studies—both of which describe routine conflictual relations among organization insiders—capture much more fully the reality of school life that these Afrocentric and creationist challengers encountered than the picture of assumed stability that is usually drawn in studies of social movement activity. Conflict is the stuff of organizations, even before any external challengers come on the scene to "mess things up." If we foreground this fact about school systems—that schools (and all organizations, by extension) are chaotic, politically divided, and rarely unified in their intents and purposes—then we may be able to spot more accurately the "weak links" in organizational personnel and governance structures that make certain organizations vulnerable at different times to different challenger claims. Afrocentrists, for example, appealed to education officials using rhetoric about the "injustice" done to African American children and the "progressive" nature of their proposed solution. Where there was conflict among school system members over the veracity of this proposed problem, or over schools' goals for solving it, some administrators, teachers, and policymakers nudged closer to challenger positions, saw clearer connections between Afrocentric goals and their own objectives in the district, and facilitated the incorporation of Afrocentric materials into current, legitimate curricula (again, at least temporarily so). Creationists, meanwhile, had a different experience with the school systems they encountered, but no less built on organizational conflict. Since nearly all education professionals on record in each one of these school systems adamantly opposed the creationist position, challengers had little chance of convincing these permanent staff members of

the legitimacy of their claims, as the Afrocentric challengers were able to do with some key educators. Creationists, therefore, tried to exploit schools' conflicts with their *constituents*, instead. Appealing to voters' sense of "fairness" and "balance," creationists actually expropriated power from long-term school professionals by getting themselves elected to policy-making bodies, like school boards and legislatures. Once voted into these positions, these newly elected policymakers encountered serious conflict with the professional staff in their departments of education. Department staff and faculty were deeply skeptical of Christian conservative programs, but they were mandated to follow the public will, which was the will of the elected board.

Such areas of conflict have not been ignored by social movements researchers, as anyone who has read studies of political processes will note. But while movements scholars have not shied away from describing such occurrences of contention within organizations as occasions for challengers' "political opportunities," few have conceived of the challenged institution as almost always tending toward the "messy," and fewer still have acknowledged that these opportunities are, therefore, always potentially in place. Movement theorists, instead, have preferred to understand the challenged institution as generally stable, with only occasional (if exploitable) conditions of elite cleavage, changes in economic conditions, or decreases in repressive tactics. We will not be able to see a central dynamic in the Afrocentric and creationist challenges if we overlook the influence of mundane organizational conflict on their temporary and ultimate outcomes.

NEW INSTITUTIONALISM, PART I: THE HOMOGENIZATION OF EXPECTATIONS. A second area of organizations research that I will use to analyze these curricular challenge outcomes is what is known as new institutionalist theory, which can help us grasp the decisions made by education professionals concerning what they thought were appropriate and legitimate responses to their marginal Afrocentric or creationist challengers.

Old institutional theory, exemplified by Phillip Selznick's famous Tennessee Valley Authority research, studied organizational administrators' attentiveness to community demands and their willingness to concede programs to their constituents—even if constituents' demands often contradicted the stated mission of the organization. Organization leaders did this, according to Selznick, for political reasons—to curry community support and to maintain their positions in their agencies. Approaching Afrocentric and creationist challenges from an old institutionalist perspective, we might ask what portion of the population of a school system was African American or Christian conservative, respectively, and we would study whether and how administrators sought to accommodate those

constituents' concerns (depending on their numbers and political power in the system).[27] We can see clear links between old institutionalist organizational theory and the political opportunities strand of social movements theory: both concentrate, in some sense, on decision makers' vulnerability to constituent demands.

New institutional theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the influence of a completely different set of actors on educators' decision making. New institutionalists speak not of decision makers' mindfulness of the community's demands but, instead, of decision makers' conformity to the expectations of members of their *own organizational sector*.[28] Researchers working in this area explain organizational behavior as action that comes from following routines within the organizational field, which embody widely shared beliefs about social reality. In this study, the organizational field home to these widely shared beliefs is the larger school system: state and national.

Thinking about these challenges from a new institutionalist perspective suggests a couple of routes of study. The first route is to realize that the seven different school systems under challenge in these cases should be viewed as something more than just seven discrete organizations with locally idiosyncratic ways of responding to demands for change. These seven school systems, instead, should be understood to be members embedded in a larger institutional network of American education, in which particular forms of shared culture influenced professional educators' decision making at home, including decisions about response to challengers. Institutional norms and values, picked up in such venues as education schools and at education conferences over the course of school members' careers, ended up exerting great influence over how educators viewed Afrocentric and creationist challengers, as well as shaping their decisions over whether or not challengers' demands should be accommodated. More abstractly, these "institutional scripts" guided the local school systems, shaped how reality was constructed there, and influenced the "way things are done" in multiple realms of the systems' operations. The presence of these scripts constituted the everyday organizational lives of school personnel and, even more than that, gave value to their activities and shaped their senses of self.[29] Applied to these seven challenges, new institutional theory can help chart the kinds of expectations for change that school officials across the seven systems held, the practices they used to ensure a given level of certainty in running their systems, and the kinds of power possessed by people differently situated within the school systems themselves.

An example of how institutional insights affect our analysis of Afrocentric and creationist outcomes might be helpful. As we all know from the debates that have attended it, the curricular reform known as multicultur-

alism has become something of a nationally institutionalized "given" in new-millennium school curricula—at least in its most moderate form as cultural appreciation. No longer can a credible history of the United States be taught solely, or even predominantly, as the salutary vanquishing of indigenous peoples by Europeans. Now, in schools across the nation, history must incorporate the experiences and contributions made by native and oppressed peoples to the wider culture. Although multicultural curricula vary extensively from one school district to another and, indeed, from one classroom to another, it is simply no longer legitimate for schools to neglect Africans, Asians, women, Native Americans, Latinos, and other previously oppressed groups in history classes. Multiculturalism may range from weak to strong forms of inclusion,[30] but cultural sensitivity has become both an institutional norm and an institutional practice, insofar as it is taught as normative to would-be teachers in their education classes, and as it is incorporated into the everyday activities and visual aids of classroom materials, posters, songs, standardized tests, after-school plays, and so forth. The norms and practices of multiculturalism pervade school district curricula across the country. Teachers from Kentucky talking to teachers from California would understand the basic outline of a tenth-grade history course, say, in their colleagues' West Coast school system.

Given this established culture of at least minimal multiculturalism across U.S. school systems, and a general acceptance of its logic, it is increasingly rare for challenging movements like Afrocentrism or creationism to advance their claims without appealing to educators' commitment to pluralism, to their recognition of difference and value in all people's backgrounds, beliefs, and ideas; in short, to some resemblance to multiculturalism. Certainly, the three occasions of Afrocentric challenge that are included in this study—intellectual distant cousins to multiculturalism already, in their emphases on the problems of racism and the alternative positive identities that can be crafted for African American children through an altered curriculum—cannot be understood unless they are situated in the national conversation that has taken place in schools about multiculturalism.

Is this true of creationism, as well? Can we see the effects of institutionalized multiculturalism on the creationist campaign? Actually, yes: creationists, too, realized that their arguments would have a better chance of influencing action in school systems across the country if they were framed as commensurate with the goals and practices of multiculturalism, rather than of scripture. Creationists piggybacked their claims onto the multiculturalism infusion project, also seeking to have God represented— and, they said, world religions, in general—in textbook content, in standardized tests, in teacher lectures.[31] Aware of multiculturalism's institu-

tional credibility, creationists did not speak of *replacing* evolution in the classroom, but of *supplementing* it with new scientific studies of genetic change, of the irreducible complexity of certain biological functions, of questionable Darwinian theory. They attempted to align their practices with the practices already accepted in the wider institution of public school teaching—an important component of which is now multiculturalism and its emphasis on inclusion. That creationists failed to convince education insiders of the correctness of their practices does not indicate that they did not attempt to tap into the common-sense logics and practices with which educators were familiar. Educators simply used more potent means to rebuff them.

I will argue that only when we understand these everyday, organizational routines that characterize school personnel's "ways of doing things"—such as the now common-sense incorporation of multicultural materials into the school curriculum—will we be able to contemplate more completely their reactions to the two different cases of challenge, Afrocentrism and creationism.

NEW INSTITUTIONALISM, PART II: THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL EXPECTATIONS. I stated above that there were two avenues of study suggested by new institutionalist theory, and for the last couple of pages I have described the first—the consensus that has built up around certain ways of doing things, like teaching subjects from a multicultural perspective—in virtually all U.S. schools from coast to coast. This homogenization around preferences and activities has been shaped by schools of education, textbook publishers, and the like.

The second avenue suggested by new institutionalist theory is to take seriously the observation that organizational routines are also established at the local level in each school system, not just at the level of the larger field, and that these local practices also constrain or enable challenger efforts. Because public education in this nation is a system that is run more locally than nationally, state departments of education and local school boards have a great deal of say in how their curricula will actually be structured and how their outputs (e.g., students' learning) will be measured. Although tied together ideologically by a national normative structure, this nation's state and local school systems are home to a huge variety of unique structures. Systems of testing vary from state to state and across districts, for example, as do protocols for developing curricula, teacher rewards, and extracurricular activities. Even if challengers' demands may make some wider cultural sense to educators because of their family resemblance to multiculturalism, for example, or because they have parallels with extant instruction, each system's *local* practices surrounding teaching and curriculum allow for varying amounts of revision

to be concretely integrated into its system. Because these local organizational imperatives heavily, and variably, influence how schools decide to incorporate or deflect reforms into the system, they must also be added to this study of Afrocentric and creationist challenges and outcomes. Recognizing that local organizational variation may exist simultaneously with institutional practices provides the only path for sketching the full profile of these challenge events.

Taking these multiple facts into account, I have designed the study to account for differences in the outcomes of these cases, both *between* types of cases (comparing the three Afrocentric challenges to the four creationist challenges), and *within* types of cases (comparing each of the three Afrocentric cases to one another; and comparing the four creationist cases to one another).

So, when all is said and done, a comparative study of Afrocentric and creationist challenges in seven U.S. school systems from 1980–2000 is not only intrinsically interesting, but also places us squarely at the intersection of three different sociological subfields—cultural sociology, social movements, and organizational sociology—not to mention theories of race, religion, and education. Looking through each of these lenses, separately, clarifies different dimensions of these challenges. Looking through them all at once, however, will yield an even better understanding of who Afrocentrists and creationists were, what they were fighting for, and how schools responded to each of them. Until recently, I would argue, sociologists have done too little work at the intersections of these approaches. Cultural sociologists often have studied discourse without demonstrating how discursive acts "matter" in concrete political and organizational contexts. Organizational researchers frequently have explored the reproductive capacities of stable institutions but have neglected to discuss the disruption of such duplicative processes by groups like challengers. And social movements researchers have focused on questions of when and why collective action events (like challenging movements) emerge to alter institutional control, but they have not considered as carefully the institutional processes constraining and enabling those challenges. In the current state of the sociological enterprise, too rarely have the three analytical paths had occasion to meet.

I intend for the analysis of these cases to braid these strands together. The study of culture, for instance, can be made more substantial by looking historically and comparatively at ground-level, institutional challenges like these, which use language forms and images to advance their causes. A comparison of Afrocentric and creationist efforts can demonstrate how discourse operates in real time and in concrete practice, and how very similar rhetoric—about bias and educational neglect—"works"

differently, depending on the identity of the claimants, the cultural and historical period in which the rhetoric is used, and the organizational context in which the arguments are received.[32]

Meanwhile, in seeking to explain Afrocentric and creationist outcomes in the schools, we will see how the social movements literature benefits from an infusion of organizational insights. While recent work in the study of movements has encouraged examining the interrelationships between cultural processes, organizational mobilization, and the structure of political opportunities in social movements' emergence and success,[33] a crucial factor that I believe this work has generally overlooked is the everyday logics that operate in organizations, and the ways that these practices contribute or detract from challengers' success. It is not just the extraordinary circumstances, resulting from volatile change, that generate political opportunities; rather, commonplace, routinized practices, or institutional cultures at both the national and local levels also shape challenger outcomes.[34] What is more, if we do not consider institutional factors that influence challenger processes and outcomes, we will miss noticing a crucial distinction between *political power* and *institutional power*. Creationists, for example, seem to have been unable to convert raw political power into institutional power (transforming their votes on school boards into lasting curricular revisions), while Afrocentrists seem to have been unable to sustain any real institutional power once their revisions had been incorporated into the curriculum (converting curricular change into universal teaching processes).

Finally, organizational theory is hungry for insights that can come only from exploring significant instances of institutional change, such as from occasions of social movement activity. Having spent many of the last twenty years documenting the "structuration," or the establishment and maintenance, of durable routines in organizational worlds, many organizations scholars are now trying to figure out how and why change is possible in these apparently hardened institutions. "Stickiness" was the dominant metaphor used to describe institutions in the early days of institutional theory: once a cultural script and a set of practices had consolidated in a field, so went the theory, then it was very hard to break the mold of those routines in that institution. For years, in fact, the whole idea of "institutional change" seemed to many institutionalists to be an oxymoron; change and institutionalization were often theorized to exist at opposite ends of the sociological enterprise.[35] The analysis of challenges like Afrocentrism and creationism can be helpful in revising the assumption of this opposition. Both challenges did frequently make headway in their respective districts, but then they also got thwarted by schools. Acknowledging and investigating the competing presence of conflict, in-

stitutionalized scripts, and local organizational structures in the public school system adds to new institutional theory.[36]

What Is to Come

Having discussed the abstract features of these challenges, I want next to present a brief but, I hope, instructive sketch of late-twentieth-century Afrocentric and creationist movements. In chapter 2, I will introduce the intellectual roots of both movements and the work that actors have been doing within each to define what constitutes "Afrocentrism" and "creationism." Both of these movements took place in the context of larger historical movements. Many Afrocentric ideological concepts, for example, had their origins in Black Nationalist thought,[37] while the creationist movement in the 1980s and 1990s had roots in several important episodes in American history, including repeated conflicts between orthodox and progressive Protestants, seventy-five years of legal debate in this country concerning the teaching of evolution and creationism in the public schools, and the rise of the New Religious Right in the late 1970s.[38]

As for the rest of the book, beginning in chapter 3, I will provide in-depth analyses of the three Afrocentric and four creationist cases, in turn, describing the various actors involved in each location, the rhetoric used there, and the outcomes that resulted in each of the cases. We will see the pattern emerge of early inroads made by the Afrocentrists, followed by significantly diminished later results; and we will note the temporary political coups that creationists sometimes won, followed by publicly heralded defeat.

In chapter 4, I investigate the strengths that Afrocentrists possessed as rhetorical entrepreneurs and as exploiters / casualties of political and organizational opportunities. I demonstrate why, in the 1980s and 1990s, Afrocentrists had an easier time getting professional educators to consider their demands, while creationists faced more hardened opposition among professionals. In that chapter, I will look in depth at the three discursive resources Afrocentrists had access to and that creationists generally lacked. Afrocentrists had a compelling problem that educators could not deny (the poor education that generations of African American students had received in American public schools); they could use an effective charge of discrimination against reluctant school officials (they called educators "racist" if they were white and opposed to Afrocentrism, "race traitors" if they were black and opposed); and they were contesting a discipline that was seen to be more or less negotiable (history, in contrast to creationists' target of science teaching). Upon describing these rhetori-

cal resources, I then turn to the politics and organizational practices influencing Afrocentric outcomes.

In chapters 5 and 6, I compare creationists' rhetorical assets to Afrocentrists' assets, and find that on all three of the cultural dimensions, creationists were less advantaged than the Afrocentrists. Additionally, creationists were encumbered by a fourth cultural burden that Afrocentrists were completely unhindered by: legal precedent, which could automatically thwart their campaign's progress. I will illustrate how their adversaries always condemned creationists for abridging First Amendment guarantees of separation of church and state. Then, I turn to the question of politics and the organizational routines that the four school systems used in the creationist cases, and I will look at their distinctive contributions to creationists' ultimate defeat. In this discussion, I will describe the relationship between the political power that creationists sometimes were able to garner and compare that kind of power to educators' institutional, or professional, power. I find that political power to make decisions does not easily convert to bureaucratic professional power to implement them.

In chapter 7, I revisit the theoretical arguments I have introduced in this chapter and analyze the differences in Afrocentric and creationist outcomes in terms of culture, politics, and organization. This discussion will set up a final consideration of how an examination of Afrocentrism and creationism matters for social scientific theory.