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978-0-521-19046-6 - Evolution, Creationism, and the Battle to Control America's Classrooms

Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer

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EVOLUTION, CREATIONISM, AND THE BATTLE TO CONTROL AMERICA'S CLASSROOMS

Who should decide what children are taught in school? This question lies at the heart of the evolution–creation wars that have become a regular feature of the U.S. political landscape. Michael Berkman and Eric Plutzer show that, since the 1925 *Scopes* “monkey trial,” many have argued that the people should decide by majority rule and through political institutions; others variously point to the federal courts, educational experts, or scientists as the ideal arbiters. Berkman and Plutzer illuminate who *really* controls the nation’s classrooms. Based on their innovative survey of 926 high school biology teachers, they show that the real power often lies with individual educators who make critical decisions in their own classrooms. Broad teacher discretion sometimes leads to excellent instruction in evolution. But the authors also find evidence of strong creationist tendencies in America’s public high schools and, more generally, a systematic undermining of science and the scientific method in many classrooms.

Michael Berkman is Professor of Political Science at the Pennsylvania State University, where he also serves as the director of undergraduate studies and director of the minor in business and the liberal arts. He is the author (with Eric Plutzer) of *Ten Thousand Democracies: Politics and Public Opinion in America's School Districts* (2005) and many articles appearing in such journals as the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *PLoS Biology*. He currently serves on the editorial board of the *American Journal of Education*.

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