

Brandeis: How a Liberal University Reacts to a Black Take-over

The struggle is for power—power to control one's educational destiny.—From a publication of black students at Brandeis University.

Sure it was a power struggle, but that doesn't mean you close your ears to what the black students are saying.—A Brandeis physics professor.

Waltham, Massachusetts. Morris B. Abram, president of Brandeis since last autumn, once coauthored a monograph, entitled "How to Stop Violence in Your Community," which served as a model for laws adopted in the South to curb the Ku Klux Klan. Little did he then know that one day he would be trying to prevent a confrontation initiated by black students from erupting into violence.

About 65 black students took control of Ford Hall at Brandeis on 8 January and occupied it for 11 days. Ford Hall contains the university switchboard, some faculty and administrative offices, classrooms, chemistry and psychology laboratories, and the university's computer. (The university managed to establish an alternative telephone service.) Although the university's life was disrupted during this time, the take-over ended without violence. Abram and his advisers decided not to call in the police to evict the demonstrators. The black students kept Ford Hall in an orderly state, but left saying their demands had not been met.

Abram has been widely praised for his skillful handling of the troublesome events at Brandeis in January. Other universities may profit from learning about Brandeis' successes in dealing with a difficult situation, and may also profit from its mistakes. In an era when "all black people are having confrontations with white people," in the words of one student, any university with a significant number of black students can face a severe challenge.

Most faculty members and students feel that one of the things that was done right at Brandeis was to refuse to call in the police. In an interview with *Science*, Abram explained, "If you bring in the police, even those who urge you to do it will afterward say that you did it too soon, or too late,

that you used too much force, or not enough force. He who brings in the police will be without a friend." Abram did indicate, however, that there could have been circumstances under which he would have been forced to call in the police, such as violence in Ford Hall or a fire (the firemen would have demanded police protection before coming on campus).

Calling in the police might well have proved disastrous. Reports were circulated that some students in Ford Hall were armed and were prepared to die defending themselves if the police came in, and also that some students were willing to burn down Ford Hall if the police came. Whether or not such threats were realistic, they did greatly increase the tensions of the situation.

Faculty-Student Dispute

In many university disturbances the struggle has been between the students and the administration. While Abram served as a tangible "enemy" for black students, the underlying dispute at Brandeis was between students and faculty, not students and administration. The crucial role of the faculty in the dispute was brought home when professors considered the first of the black students' ten demands—that an Afro-American and African studies department be created, with a head selected by a committee chosen by black students. This proved to be the "gut" issue for both sides.

"The kids were doing a black power thing but it had student power implications for the university," thinks politics professor Lawrence H. Fuchs. The black students wanted "redistribution of power" in the university, but Brandeis professors were not about to give up their traditional right to set standards for faculty selection. Only a few professors were willing to let black students choose the chairman of the Afro-

American studies department. After 5 days of the Ford Hall occupation the faculty voted to create a "legitimate" department for black studies, for which the faculty would be chosen by the regular procedures of the university, a concession which did not meet the students' demands. "We believe in academic freedom," a black student explained, "but at Brandeis there are only white people making decisions. If there were 15 black people on the faculty, we'd be glad to give them the right to pick the department chairman." (This year, there are two Negroes among Brandeis' 380 permanent faculty members.)

Seventy percent of the 2000 undergraduates and 62 percent of the professors at Brandeis, a Jewish-sponsored, secular university, are Jewish.* Although black anti-Semitism has been intensively discussed in the press, no one interviewed at Brandeis thought that anti-Semitism had played a part in the recent struggle. "We don't make a distinction between Jews and other whites," one black student explained, "they all treat black people in the same way."

Even though anti-Semitism was not discernible, the fact that Brandeis is a predominantly Jewish university did have some influence on the course of discussions during the crisis. In the closed faculty meetings, professors talked about how Jewish experience was relevant to the events at hand. Some argued that Jews, as a persecuted minority, should, of all people, be able to understand something of what it was like to be black in a white society. On the other hand, some professors are said to have argued that Jews should not duplicate the mistakes of the 1930's, when German Jews did not sufficiently resist coercive acts against them.

Many people wondered why black students should pick on such a "liberal" university. Especially in the past couple of years, Brandeis has done more than most Boston-area colleges to assist black students. Not only do many Brandeis faculty members regard themselves as sympathetic to the Negro cause but collectively they contributed \$10,000 to help bring black students to the university this year on a "Transitional Year Program," designed to prepare them

*An excellent profile of Brandeis University appears in the January-February issue of *Change in Higher Education*, a new magazine. The article "The last academic entrepreneur" was written by Gerald Grant, a Harvard teaching fellow. A thoughtful account of the 11-day crisis by President Abram appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on 16 February.

for admission to college. When these transitional-year students joined black undergraduates and graduate students in occupying Ford Hall, it is perhaps understandable that some professors felt betrayed. (The situation was even more strained in some instances. One of President Abram's special assistants, a graduate student in social work, was one of the leaders of the students who occupied Ford Hall.)

But if professors asked, "Why Brandeis?" black students could reply, "Why not?" For one thing, when black protests erupt at other colleges around the country, black students are forced to ask themselves and each other whether they are doing enough for the cause at their own institution. For another, there is a special satisfaction in pointing out the "guilt" of a "liberal" institution like Brandeis.

Some faculty members think the Brandeis take-over was connected with the protests at San Francisco State College. Faculty members from San Francisco State met with black students at Brandeis on 7 January, immediately before the take-over of Ford Hall, and part of the students' intent seems to have been to show their solidarity with the struggle at San Francisco State and to demonstrate their "manhood."

One of their purposes in occupying Ford Hall was to force the Brandeis administration to pay attention to the needs of black students. "It tactically seemed the best time to do it; they were trying to ignore us," commented Alexander E. Aikens, who was selected to speak to *Science* on behalf of black students. At another point in the interview, Aikens commented that President Abram only "seems to respond when pressure is put on him."

What Does "Racism" Mean?

The accusation of "racism" is painful for white liberals, and it is important to determine the various meanings of the term. "What they mean by white racism is indifference," thinks William M. Goldsmith, one of the white professors who has worked hardest to move Brandeis to assist black students. "They mistake due process for racism," exclaims John Senders, a psychologist aligned with the "hardliners" on the faculty. Roland Warren, a professor of social work, pointed out how much money the faculty had contributed from their own pockets to assist the Transitional Year Program, and notes, "Yet, for black students the



"Brandeis isn't perfect, but God knows it is not a malevolent institution," Brandeis President Morris B. Abram said in a recent interview.

university is racist. I could understand it if I were a black student; there is a good deal of foot-dragging in a university."

The university, with its slow, deliberative manner of operation, is now being confronted, at many institutions, with the immediate demands of a group of impatient black students, whose number has grown greatly in the past couple of years. This number is now large enough so that black students can make their will felt, but still small enough so that black students feel isolated. Furthermore, the rapidly increasing number of black students at white colleges is a forced growth, and is taking place before there are noticeable numbers of black faculty members, administrators, and courses, thus enhancing the impression that the colleges are ignoring the black community.

The black student wants a curriculum that is relevant to his needs, and increasingly feels that such a curriculum cannot be designed by white people. "When I'm finished here," Alexander Aikens explains, "I'm going to organize in the black community. I need a good background in black history for community organization."

One of the most compelling arguments for courses in Afro-American studies was offered in the Rossovsky report, recently released at Harvard. According to the report, the absence of course offerings in many areas of Afro-American culture "is the single most potent source of the black students' discontent at Harvard. The lack of such courses can strike the black

students as a negative judgment by Harvard on the importance of these areas . . . and, by inference, on the importance of black people themselves."

"Many students," the report continues, "express the need to legitimize, inwardly as well as publicly, their presence at Harvard while other blacks remain in the ghetto. . . . What the black student wants is an opportunity to study the black experience and to employ the intellectual resources of Harvard in seeking solutions to the problems of the black community. . . . Such educational opportunities would help the black student justify his separation from the larger black community—and would attest that the separation was by no means radical or permanent."

Although Brandeis has done somewhat better in providing courses on Afro-American topics than Harvard has, Brandeis' black students are still adamant in their demand for creation of a relevant university environment. One reason for the feeling of isolation among black students and for the inability of some faculty members to hear their demands may be that there is relatively little sustained conversation between faculty and students, regardless of color—a situation similar to that which exists at most other universities.

Little Informal Contact

Visiting professor Pauli Murray, one of the few Negro faculty members now at Brandeis, pointed out that the university is "a suburban, resident school with a non-resident faculty. There is no facility for informal contact between faculty and students; part of our difficulty is physical." Black students did express their desire for a black studies department to relevant faculty members before the Ford Hall take-over, but were told that the faculty would never approve such a proposal.

In light of the Ford Hall take-over, it appears that the university did not act with sufficient speed in meeting the black students' requests, but there were things the administration did skillfully in handling the crisis once it arose. Abram kept a cool head, consulted extensively, and spoke with restraint, especially in the later part of the crisis. Discussions between the administration and the black students were at first hampered by the fact that large groups of people conducted them, and the composition of the black student

delegation kept changing. Finally, Roland Warren volunteered to serve as liaison between the administration and faculty and the black students. These smaller sessions (attended by Warren and two black students) seemed more useful than the larger meetings for discussing the ten "nonnegotiable" demands of the black students. In an interview Warren explained that both faculty members and students considered *negotiations* a dirty word.

Warren, a Quaker with considerable experience as a mediator, thinks that clarification of the position of each side can do a great deal to cool down a controversy. No voice was ever raised, Warren noted, during the series of meetings with the black students. Warren thinks it was important to create a situation where the black students could leave Ford Hall "with their heads high." He also thinks it was very important that Abram, who, in his opinion, did "an admirable job throughout," gathered around him a strong advisory group composed of people with different points of view to assist him during the 11 days.

If the Brandeis administration did many things that were right during the crisis, it may also have done things that did not help the situation. For a university that eventually decided to solve matters through peaceful means, the initial administration and faculty statements were abrasive, in contrast to the conciliatory words used toward the end of the 11 days. Some say the initial statements were made partly for the benefit of the private financial benefactors so important to Brandeis' survival.

One point that college administrators might bear in mind is the fact that universities, especially when confronted with black student revolts, may have to modify their willingness to deal with the press. The black students interviewed were very bitter about Abram's access to television and newspaper coverage. In their opinion, Abram had an opportunity to justify his position to the public which they did not have, and they resented what they regarded as a pro-administration bias by the press. Alexander Aikens deplored a tendency by the press to show a "weary President Abram" trying to deal with "fresh young blacks." A policy of keeping statements to the mass media concerning confrontations with black students to a minimum could prove useful both when universities are in active

dispute with black students and in subsequent periods.

For those who want an integrated university, one of the worst effects of the Ford Hall crisis seems to have been creation of a "we-them" attitude and, perhaps, increased racism among all groups. The crisis seems not to have facilitated communication between blacks and whites. Black students have boycotted the black studies courses

and have withdrawn from university committees.

Among members of the faculty, the crisis, according to one faculty member, has left "very deep scars," after violent disagreements among professors about what attitude to take toward the Ford Hall occupation. And the Ford Hall event seems to have greatly demoralized some of the senior people who had been most responsible for

Key NSF Hearings Open with Handler

A precedent-setting series of authorization hearings into the programs and budget of the National Science Foundation was launched on 17 March by the House subcommittee on science, research, and development, chaired by Emilio Q. Daddario (D-Conn.). The hearings, which were scheduled to continue for 9 days, are the first to be held under 1968 legislation that requires NSF to win annual congressional authorization for its budget instead of operating under a continuing authorization as it has previously done. The hearings will result in a bill setting a ceiling on the amount of money that can be appropriated to NSF in the next fiscal year. They will also provide NSF with an unusual opportunity to explain and justify its programs before the relatively friendly Daddario subcommittee, instead of before the more aloof appropriations subcommittee.

NSF spokesmen lost no time in taking advantage of the opportunity. The Foundation's lead-off witness, Philip Handler, chairman of the National Science Board, the NSF's policy-making body, gave what several subcommittee members, including Daddario, considered an eloquent lecture on the importance of scientific research and on its relevance to national needs. An excerpt from Handler's presentation follows.

"There are those who say science isn't relevant to all our important and pressing social problems. But it seems to me that their attitude doesn't arise from the failure of science and technology so much as from its wholesale success; that it is precisely because of our great capabilities which have so expanded the gross national product and life for eighty percent of the people . . . that we have twenty percent whose aspirations quite naturally rose and perhaps they rose more rapidly than our nation knew how to meet them. But the reason for these social problems is not the failure of science and technology, it is the success of science and technology. And we are not through. Whether you are concerned with the public health, with pollution problems, with urban sprawl, the national defense, transportation, communication, age or population control, in every one of these areas what is required is more science, to provide new technologies, not less. And, as I say, there are my colleagues, some in science and many outside science, who will ask how can you sit here and worry about pulsars and quasars and the mechanisms of enzyme action and DNA when there are Americans who are hungry in Harlem and starving in Mississippi and dying in Vietnam. And all of that is true. But for my part I simply do not believe that science and social action are in any sense mutually exclusive. I see no reason to think that this is so. Quite the opposite . . . science-based technology will provide the means for achieving some of our goals in social action, and I believe that our country, which is wealthy beyond the dreams of many a few years ago, can easily afford both social action, to the extent to which we go down that trail, and the exercises of the human imagination which are called science."—PHILIP M. BOFFEY

NEWS IN BRIEF

● **SOVIET UNION FLOATS OCEAN DISARMAMENT TREATY:** The Soviet Union has submitted a plan which would prohibit nuclear weapons and military installations of any kind on the ocean floor outside a nation's 12-mile territorial limit. The Russian government made its proposal recently at the 18-nation disarmament conference in Geneva. The Russian proposal, which Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) officials have called "a sweeping one," would eliminate all military activities on the ocean floor. ACDA Director Gerard C. Smith has said that the United States probably will not support a proposal which would eliminate the possibility of any military use of the seabed. Smith did say, however, that the United States is concerned with negotiating an agreement to bar all weapons of mass destruction, including missiles, from the ocean floor. The 18-nation conference, the United Nation's negotiating body on disarmament, is expected to continue its discussion of disarmament of the oceans during the present 8-week session. France, which was an original member of the conference, has declined to participate in the international disarmament talks.

● **STENNIS FORMS COMMITTEE TO STUDY DEFENSE R&D:** Senator John Stennis (D-Miss.), chairman of the Armed Services Committee, has created an ad hoc committee, chaired by Senator Thomas J. McIntyre (D-N.H.), to study defense research and development spending patterns. The purpose of the ad hoc committee, consisting of senators on Armed Services, is to study specific Defense Department weapons research programs in preparation for hearings which will be held soon on the defense authorization budget.

● **DEFENSE SCIENCE BOARD:** The Defense Science Board (DSB), which is the senior advisory group on science and technology for the Defense Department, has five new members-at-large. They are Arthur T. Biehl of the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, Lewis M. Branscomb of the University of Colorado, Daniel J. Fink of General Electric Corporation, Charles Herzfeld of International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, and William G. McMillan of the University of Cali-

fornia. The 28-member Defense Science Board, which consists of 20 members-at-large representing universities and industry and 8 ex officio members representing major federal agencies, meets periodically to assess scientific research and development for military purposes, and to advise the Director of Defense Research and Engineering (DDR&E). New members of DSB are appointed on the recommendation of the DDR&E. Robert L. Sproull of Cornell University is chairman of the board, a post which Frederick Seitz, president of the National Academy of Sciences, held from 1964 through 1968.

● **TAPE HEADS ASSOCIATED UNIVERSITIES:** Gerald F. Tape, a member of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), has been named President of the Associated Universities Inc. (AUI), which operates Brookhaven National Laboratory and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, West Virginia. Tape, who served as president of AUI for a short term in 1962-63, has been an AEC commissioner since 1963. A physicist, he worked at the M.I.T. Radiation Laboratory during World War II, and was associated with the Brookhaven National Laboratory from 1950 to 1962. AUI, a nonprofit research management consortium of nine eastern universities, was created in 1947. It operates Brookhaven for the AEC and the Radio Astronomy Observatory for the National Science Foundation. AUI has an annual operating budget of about \$54 million, of which \$49 million is support from the AEC and about \$5 million from NSF.

● **BRITISH PLAN GIANT TELESCOPE:** The British government, which has delayed major investments in radio astronomy because of economic stringencies, has decided to finance a new \$4.8-million radio telescope at Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory at Cambridge University. A 3-mile array of eight paraboloid dishes will make up the new radio telescope. It is expected to extend British studies of quasars and radio galaxies, and to make use of the aperture synthesis techniques devised by British astronomer Martin Ryle, who heads Cambridge's radio astronomy team. The telescope is expected to be in operation in approximately 2 or 3 years.

helping black students come to Brandeis.

White professors at Brandeis are now well aware, even if some of them were not before, that black students will not automatically and gratefully accept whatever the university offers them. "The idea that universities can have black students on the university's terms is finished," physicist Robert V. Lange comments.

Even though Brandeis weathered the Ford Hall crisis, black-white problems are not yet resolved. Black students still say that the administration has not made enough progress in meeting their demands, and still insist on the right to select the head of the black studies department, an idea which is opposed by a large majority of the faculty. In March, a couple of hundred white students staged "sit-ins" inside the Brandeis administration building in support of the black demands. (Whites had staged a sympathetic sit-in during the January crisis, but were not allowed by black students to assist in the occupation of Ford Hall.) On 24 February, a major university building was considerably damaged by fires set by an arsonist. Though no suspect has been arrested as of this writing, inevitably some people at Brandeis suspect that the arson is somehow connected to the Ford Hall affair.

The Future of Universities

And so, Brandeis, like many other universities, continues to be in trouble. It is understandable that black (or white) students find it difficult to accept university life as it is now constituted, but it will prove impossible for sensitive administrators, white or black, to function in an atmosphere of forceful take-over of buildings and threats of arson and armed violence. If such conditions persist, it will be progressively harder for universities to find outside backing and first-rate administrators and, eventually, to find a faculty. At least at present, university teachers and administrators do not make their vocational decisions with the same motives as soldiers joining the Green Berets.

Student protest may eventually force out "liberal" administrators, but in their place are likely to emerge not radicals, but men who will practice repression, not reconciliation. No doubt the pitched battles that would then ensue would provide the direct confrontation that some student activists are hoping for.—BRYCE NELSON