



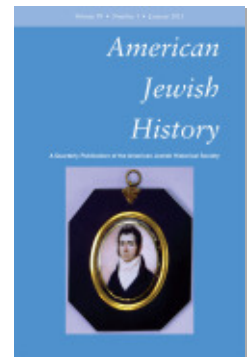
PROJECT MUSE®

Seventeen Months in the President's Chair: Morris Abram,
Black-Jewish Relations and the Anatomy of a Failed
Presidency

Jonathan Krasner

American Jewish History, Volume 99, Number 1, January 2015, pp. 27-77
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2015.0012>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/565412>

Seventeen Months in the President's Chair: Morris Abram, Black-Jewish Relations and the Anatomy of a Failed Presidency

JONATHAN KRASNER

By virtually all accounts, Morris Berthold Abram was an inspired choice to lead Brandeis University when its founding president, Abram L. Sachar, announced his retirement in 1967. A Rhodes Scholar and civil rights lawyer, Abram served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations as the first general counsel to the Peace Corps, and the United States representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. What is more, he had stature in the Jewish community as the youngest national president of the American Jewish Committee. Abram's selection was lauded by faculty members, donors, and Jewish community leaders alike, and his inauguration, in October 1968, was celebrated with great fanfare. A mere seventeen months later, however, Abram abruptly resigned, leaving the university adrift during one of the most tumultuous periods in its history.

Abram's tenure coincided with a season of student unrest at American universities, much of it propelled by a radicalized civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. At Brandeis, the new president had barely established himself when he was confronted by a black student takeover of a central administration and communications complex. The eleven day occupation of Ford and Sydeman Halls, which caught Abram and most of the campus by surprise, threatened to paralyze his young administration and tear the community apart. Even after the immediate crisis was resolved, student-administration relations remained tense and threatened to explode in a broad-based show of student defiance.

When Abram announced his departure, in February 1970, the conventional wisdom was that he was fleeing a damaged presidency of an unruly campus. Abram insisted that his resignation was occasioned by his decision to jump into the contest for the Democratic nomination in that year's New York State Senate race. But even before his short-lived campaign fizzled, his explanation failed to satisfy many.

Abram was certainly looking for an escape hatch. But the impetus for his departure was more complicated than it first appeared. In fact, Abram emerged from the Ford Hall incident relatively unscathed. He managed to defuse the crisis while keeping his various constituencies

united. Abram's refusal to call in the local police to forcibly remove the demonstrators distinguished him from other university presidents in similar predicaments, and was widely hailed at the time. Yet, in spite of the plaudits, the occupation left Abram feeling embittered and even betrayed. This civil rights activist who fought successfully to overturn the State of Georgia's discriminatory electoral system was hardly a racist "cracker"¹ as the protesters alleged. Nonetheless, he was incapable of finding common ground with the African American occupiers and their white sympathizers. Abram's palpable frustration and imperious demeanor poisoned his subsequent relationship with students and faculty.

The Ford Hall crisis is worthy of attention because it sheds light on the political metamorphosis of a prominent American Jewish leader from a Southern liberal voting rights activist to a neo-conservative opponent of affirmative action. Abram's transformation is fascinating in part because it seems to capture a more general Jewish disillusionment with the direction and tenor of the civil rights movement in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. An exploration of Abram's failed presidency also contributes to our understanding of late-1960s campus radicalism, the deterioration of black-Jewish relations, and the early history of Brandeis University, which was only twenty years old when Abram took the reins.

"I Was Wholly at Odds with the Life Around Me."

"Growing up" in the rural south, Morris Abram admitted, "I was wholly at odds with the life around me." Born in Fitzgerald, Georgia, on June 19, 1918, the second of four children, Abram was raised in a family of limited financial means but an almost religious belief in the value of secular education, especially for boys. Abram fulfilled these expectations, not only by earning top grades at the University of Georgia, but also by attending Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar and earning a law degree from the University of Chicago. Abram's father, Sam, a Romanian immigrant, was a struggling shopkeeper in the poor part of town who sold work clothes and boots to black tenant farmers and railroad workers. His mother, Irene, was an educated woman with unrealized aspirations to emulate her father and aunt and become a physician. She was the granddaughter of an Alsatian-born rabbi, Elias Eppstein, one of the first ordained rabbis to immigrate to the United States, shortly

1. Morris B. Abram, *The Day is Short: An Autobiography* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 187.

after the revolutions of 1848. Morris was a bookish and quiet boy, a loner who devoured the non-fiction section of the local public library.²

Abram grew up feeling ambivalent about his Judaism. There were few Jews in Fitzgerald, and young Morris felt “marked as an outsider” by his failure to attend Sunday school and refusal to participate in daily public school prayers. With the closest Reform synagogue ninety miles away, in Albany, Georgia, the Abram family did not attend services and Morris never had a bar mitzvah. The Judaism that was observed in the Abram home deemphasized Jewish distinctiveness and seemed to be ritually impoverished and drained of warmth.³

Casting a long shadow on the southern Jewish landscape of Abram’s childhood was the Leo Frank lynching, which occurred in Marietta, Georgia, three years before Morris was born. Two months later, members of the lynching party were involved in a huge cross burning on Stone Mountain, marking the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. “From whispered accounts of the story, I could tell that in the 1920s my parents and their Jewish friends were still unnerved by the fate of Leo Frank,” Abram recalled. “As a young man I felt the intense need to tread cautiously where Southern passions might be aroused.”⁴

Though the Frank lynching terrorized the Jewish community, it was an isolated incident. By contrast, over 3,000 African Americans were lynched in the South between 1880 and 1930, with over 450 victims in Georgia alone. Even so, Abram’s sense of being an outsider did not induce him to identify with his black neighbors or even question the justice of their circumstances prior to entering university. “Segregation was simply an accepted fact,” he recalled. Indeed, so conventional were Abram’s views that when, at the age of fourteen, he was invited to preach in a black Baptist church, his theme was: “The South, a Friend of the Negro.”⁵

2. *Ibid.*, 9–19.

3. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

4. *Ibid.*, 20–21; On the Frank case see Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), and Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

5. On the history of lynching in Georgia see, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Abram’s oratorical abilities, which were first displayed in a high school declamation contest, were renowned in Fitzgerald and nearby towns, and he was occasionally asked to preach at local churches and bar mitzvahs. Years later, Abram shuddered when recalling his support for segregation, which he articulated in the sermon (“In all things purely social the Negro can be as separate as the fingers . . .”), as well as the sermon’s larger message, crafted in response to the Great Migration: “Don’t be fooled by promises. Always remember that your best friend is your mother, your next is the South.” Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 33–37, 47.

It was only at the University of Georgia that Abram was confronted with dissenting voices on the fairness and rationality of segregation, and then almost exclusively “from some New York Jewish quarter on campus.” Such subversive talk initially made Abram anxious, fearing that it would fan the flames of antisemitism. But it also appears to have encouraged him, for the first time, to set aside conventional wisdom and think through the issue on his own. His epiphany came during a school break, while tending his father’s store. It was harvest season, and the street outside was crowded with tenant farmers and field hands, blacks and whites. As Abram “looked over the sea of ragged, unwashed, illiterate folk,” he found himself testing his basic assumptions about segregation. It occurred to him that he had as little in common with the “rednecks” as he did with the “backwoods Negroes.” Why, he wondered, did the social unacceptability of some whites not redound upon the race as a whole, whereas with blacks, “why must all be acceptable before any are acceptable?” He forced himself to admit that nothing in his experience could justify this blatant double standard.⁶

His newfound convictions also had obvious implications for his personal identity struggle: “I probably realized at the time that I was identifying with the blacks, the implicit thrust of my question also being: ‘Why should all Jews be acceptable before any are accepted — or even more to the point, why are all Jews held responsible for the conduct of some?’”⁷

Abram looked back upon this revelation as a turning point that cemented his fealty to liberalism. From Abram’s perspective, the essence of liberalism was the safeguarding of individual freedom and legal equality. These principles led inexorably to his protracted legal struggle to invalidate Georgia’s discriminatory electoral system. The county unit system that had governed the state’s Democratic primary process since 1917 assigned disproportionate weight to rural over urban counties. Because black registration was concentrated in the cities, and Georgia was essentially a one-party Democratic state, the scheme systematically disenfranchised African American voters. The urban counties were also comparatively more progressive. Abram’s later failed Congressional bid in 1954 was, in part, emblematic of a system that rewarded the most reactionary candidates.⁸

6. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 47–48; Robert Turner, “Brandeis’ New President Saw Segregation as Boy in Georgia,” *Boston Sunday Globe* March 10, 1968.

7. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 48.

8. “Man of Many Talents: Morris Berthold Abram,” *New York Times* February 23, 1968, 38; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 48–49; Calvin Kytle and James A. Mackay, *Who Runs Georgia?* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), xiii.

Abram's first legal challenge to the county unit system was filed in 1950. But his "one man one vote" argument was dodged by a Supreme Court under the influence of Associate Justice Felix Frankfurter, who warned his colleagues not to enter into the "political thicket," lest they damage the Court as an institution. By the early 1960s, however, changes in the Court's composition rendered it far more amenable to intervention in reapportionment cases. The stage was set in the landmark 1962 *Baker v. Carr* decision which circumscribed the "political question doctrine," cherished by Frankfurter, and found that the federal courts had the jurisdiction to rule in legislative redistricting cases. The following year, Abram, joined by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, argued in front of the Supreme Court for the unconstitutionality of Georgia's county unit system in *Sanders v. Gray*. By an 8-1 margin, the Court struck down the electoral system under the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection guarantee. "The concept of political equality," Justice William O. Douglas memorably wrote in the majority decision, "can mean only one thing—one person, one vote."⁹

The *Baker* and *Sanders* decisions were hailed in *Ebony* magazine as "a Magna Carta for city dwellers," who were disproportionately black.¹⁰ The cases also secured Abram's reputation as a leading civil rights attorney. Abram was subsequently hailed by one writer as "the most outstanding Jewish civil rights leader in the South,"¹¹ while the caption underneath his photograph in the most recent edition of Eli Evans' classic history of Jewish life in the South reads "the man who unmasked the Klan" — a reference to his work in the 1940s as counsel to the southern regional office of the Anti-Defamation League, where he helped draft several laws against the Klan, which were subsequently enacted in five southern states and 53 cites.¹² And even if such appellations were embellishments, they faithfully recalled Abram's activism and visibility on behalf of racial equality in an often hostile social and political climate. At the time, many in Atlanta's political establishment,

9. Michal Belknap, *The Supreme Court Under Earn Warren, 1953-1969* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 109-120; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, Revised Edition (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 230-233.

10. Lillian Calhoun, "New Vote Hope for Negroes," *Ebony* (October 1962), 43.

11. Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 284.

12. Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 230.

including those involved in the formidable Talmadge political machine,¹³ denounced him.¹⁴ Abram's bona fides within the civil rights community were likewise burnished during John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign. At the behest of campaign aide Sargent Shriver, Abram arranged for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s release from an Atlanta jail.¹⁵

As Abram's commitment to civil rights was solidified and reinforced through his professional work and growing personal ties with African American leaders, his Jewish identity was also strengthened through two adult experiences.¹⁶ The first came during the summer of 1946 when he served on Justice Robert Jackson's staff at the Nuremberg trials, while the second accrued from his involvement with the American Jewish Committee. While Abram played a minor role in the trials, mostly engaging in research and reviewing the trial records, he was afforded the opportunity to attend the proceedings, observe the defendants in the dock and compare the relative skills of the prosecutors.¹⁷ The experience affected him deeply and demonstrated to him that Judaism was an ethnicity or nationality as well as a religion. Abram and his first wife, the former Jane Maguire, came face to face with some of the survivors, the "living

13. The Talmadge family's formidable Democratic political machine and dynasty controlled Georgia politics between 1926–late-1970s. Eugene Talmadge served for three terms as Georgia governor (1933–37, 1941–43). His son Herman served as Georgia governor from 1947–55, and as a U.S. Senator from 1957–81.

14. Lewis Killian, *Black and White: Reflections of a White Southern Sociologist* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), p. 201.

15. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 125–132; Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober, *The Kennedy Presidency: An Oral History of the Era* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2003), 37. For an in-depth treatment of the Kennedy campaign's involvement in King's release from jail and Martin Luther King, Sr.'s subsequent endorsement, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 353–370. Branch's account differs somewhat from that offered by Abram. In particular, Branch sees Mayor Hartsfield, rather than Abram, as playing the decisive role in securing King's release.

16. I do not mean to suggest that Abram's experiences at Nuremberg and the AJC had a negligible effect on his attitudes about African Americans and civil rights. But Abram did not explicitly draw that connection in his writings and reflections.

17. The Nuremberg assignment was arranged by one of his jurisprudence professors, Arthur Lehman Goodhardt, who enjoyed close ties with Jackson and returned from a visit to Nuremberg with a glowing report about the dignity and scrupulousness of the proceedings interestingly, particularly in light of Deborah Lipstadt's recent takedown of Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" thesis in *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken, 2011), Abram's impressions of the Nuremberg defendants corresponded with Arendt's view of Eichmann: "I was struck that these defendants — Goering, Hess, von Ribbentrop, Keitel, Frank — did not look different from other men. . . . The incongruity of it astounded me." Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 73.

remnants of the death camps passing, hollow-eyed, through German towns." When Jane, a convert to Judaism, responded by exclaiming that, "A Jew is either a Zionist or without a heart," the anti-Zionist Abram was shaken to his core. He later characterized his experience in Nuremberg as "a major turning point in my life" explaining that, "I now understood that the veneer of civilization is thin, and that when it cracks, even in the twentieth century, the Jew is a first victim."¹⁸

At around the time that the *Sanders* decision was handed down, Abram accepted a partnership at a prominent law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, and relocated his family to New York, where he was already engaged in part-time United Nations work for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Abram was also a leading contender for the national presidency of the New York-based American Jewish Committee (AJC). He had first become involved with the Atlanta Chapter of the Committee in 1950. What began as an opportunity to make a little extra money soon became a commitment born of conviction. Abram's term as president extended from 1964 until 1968. The AJC filled a void in Abram's life. "Its programs made identification possible for the Jew who was integrated into America but not necessarily drawn to religious observance," he wrote. Abram credited the AJC with helping him discover "the essence of what it meant to me to be Jewish. That essence lies in the collective unconscious of the people from whom I spring; the linkage of ourselves one to another; the ties that we all feel, to a greater or lesser extent, to Zion; and the determination to survive as Jews, free men and women wherever we may live." In the "secular setting" of the AJC, Abram was able to overcome feelings of insecurity that he attributed to his "inadequate religious education," and assume the mantle of Jewish leadership.¹⁹ Abram's term also engendered an evolution in his own Jewish identity. He became more sympathetic to Zionism and accepting of the concept of Jewish peoplehood. Initially, in Abram's mind, both had carried an unmistakable whiff of dual loyalties.²⁰

Thus, on the eve of his appointment at Brandeis, Abram had distinguished himself as a civil rights lawyer, Kennedy and Johnson administration official and a Jewish community leader. Politically speaking, his views placed him squarely within the postwar liberal consensus. On issues of social justice and civil rights, Abram reconciled the tension between

18. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 68–76.

19. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 141–142; Marianne Rachel Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong: The American Jewish Committee, 1945–2006* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 107;

20. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 142.

freedom and equality by arguing that those who were not equipped to compete should be helped, but that the ideal of meritocracy should be preserved. “Honest men, of course, had to acknowledge that the family and even good luck advantaged some and impeded others. But wise men understood that absolute evenness cannot be achieved, certainly not by government, and that an even start in a race would not guarantee an even finish.” He also drew an explicit connection between his liberalism and his Judaism. “Jews, for ethical reasons, as well as out of self-interest, opted for the liberal mode.”²¹

“If Abe Sachar was not Immortal, Some Day they Would Need a President.”

Lost in thought on a sundrenched beach in Miami, in 1964, Morris Abram was abruptly aroused by a question from his companion, longtime AJC senior staff member Selma Hirsh: “You’re in your forties and you’ve done a lot,” she began, “but do you have any final goals?” Abram thought for a minute and responded: “I’d like to be the president of Brandeis if Abe Sachar ever quits.” Four years later, Abram’s phone rang. Real estate mogul Lawrence Wien, chairman of Brandeis University’s board of trustees was on the line. “He made an appointment without stating any purpose, but I knew — I just knew.”²²

For some time, Abram had been mulling the thought of someday running a university. “I saw Brandeis as the best way to realize my dream of public service,” he later recalled. (After his resignation, some observers wondered whether he had all along viewed it as a stepping stone to political office.²³) As a Rhodes scholar, prominent civil rights lawyer and president of the AJC, he arguably had the ideal resume to succeed Abram L. Sachar at Brandeis. The board of trustees certainly thought so. When the sixty-eight year old founding president of the only Jewish sponsored, non-sectarian university was compelled to announce his impending retirement in 1967, a search committee initially screened 120 potential candidates, eventually narrowing the field down to six. Morris Abram’s name topped the list, which also included medical school administrators Robert J. Glaser and Irving London, lawyer (and, later,

21. Morris Abram, “Liberalism & the Jews: A Symposium,” *Commentary* (January 1980), 15–16.

22. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, p. 898, AJC Oral History Project, Box 14, Morris B. Abram Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives & Rare Book Library; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 168.

23. Nina McCain, “Abram Resigns . . . Eyes Senate,” *Boston Evening Globe*, February 23, 1970; “From Campus,” *New York Times* (editorial), February 27, 1970; David Squire, interview with the author, May 6, 2010.

diplomat) Sol Linowitz, city planner and university administrator Martin Meyerson, and economist Paul Samuelson.²⁴

Abram's credentials as a Jewish leader weighed heavily in his favor. A president of Brandeis would need to combine the skills of an adept academic administrator with those of a savvy fundraiser. The latter would necessitate deep ties to the Jewish community. The trustees well understood that the university, which was barely two decades old, could not rely upon its alumni as a primary donor base. For the foreseeable future, Brandeis would continue to turn to mostly first and second generation Jewish businessmen, many of whom had not completed college themselves. They would need to be convinced that contributing to the university was a Jewish civic duty. The new president would require the rhetorical skills, charisma, and credibility to make that case. Even as its reputation for academic excellence quickly propelled it into the ranks of elite small liberal arts colleges and universities, Brandeis' finances remained precarious. Of all the finalists, Abram stood out as the individual most likely to convince erstwhile and prospective Jewish philanthropists to open their checkbooks.²⁵ Indeed, the single concern that trustees expressed about Abram was whether he would consider the presidency a long-term commitment. In retrospect, their apprehension was well placed.²⁶

When the trustees voted unanimously in February 1968 to appoint Abram as the university's second president, the prospect of running a university looked considerably more appealing than it did by the time Abram was installed the following October. The intervening months witnessed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, followed nineteen days later by the eruption of paralyzing student protests at Columbia University.²⁷ In the wake of Columbia's violent suppression of the revolt, activist Tom Hayden proclaimed in *Ramparts* magazine that,

24. Minutes, Committee on Presidential Succession, February 9, 1968, Box 26, Abram L. Sachar Brandeis University Presidential Papers, Robert D. Farber Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University (ASC-BU).

25. Peter Diamandopoulos to Abram L. Sachar, December 14, 1967, Box 21; Minutes, Committee on Presidential Succession, February 9, 1968, Abram L. Sachar Brandeis University Presidential Papers, ASC-BU.

26. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 166–167; Minutes, Committee on Presidential Succession, February 9, 1968. Chairman of the Board of Trustees Lawrence Wien told the board that he had secured a “life-long commitment” from Abram. Given that elsewhere Abram expressed the view that university presidents should limit their terms to a decade, it is unclear whether he misled Wien or the board chair was speaking hyperbolically.

27. Clayton Knowles, “Abram is Named Head of Brandeis,” *New York Times* (February 23, 1968), 38; Sylvan Fox, “Columbia Inquiry off to a Slow Start,” *New York Times* (May 8, 1968) 1, 32; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 306–309.

The goal written on the university walls was, 'Create two, three, many Columbias'; it meant expand the strike so that the U.S. must either change or send its troops to occupy American campuses. At this point the goal seems realistic; an explosive mix is present on dozens of campuses where demands for attention to student views are being disregarded by university administrators."²⁸

Over the next two years, campus activists appeared to do their best to see Hayden's prophesy to fruition, tormenting campus presidents and administrators.²⁹

The radicalization of the nation's university campuses was very much on Abram's mind as he assumed the presidency. In fact, it was the theme of his provocative inauguration address, which he later identified as his most significant statement on the subject of education. It also set the parameters of his future conflict with the Brandeis radicals. Abram lauded the students for their moral judgment and capacity for astute social criticism. But he called into question their demand that courses and curricula be made more "relevant" to the world around them, arguing that the role of the university was "to help develop an educated man," and "its relevance should be tested against that purpose." He defended the right of students to protest, so long as they did not interfere with university's function as a venue for teaching and learning. "The right of students, faculty or anyone else to disrupt the learning process is no right at all. It is a wrong. And I will do everything I can to resist it," he vowed. Moreover, he rejected students' prioritization of activism over study, arguing that "the question is not *whether* a qualified man should devote himself to attacking the ills and wrongs of the world, but *when*." He added that the question of whether to devote one's primary energies in college to activism or academic pursuits, was essentially a choice between "whether to be a sharp instrument all of one's life minus four years, or a dull instrument all of one's life."³⁰

Finally, Abram insisted that the university must avoid becoming politicized at all costs; there should be no political litmus tests for determining one's acceptability within the academic community. In an oblique reference to Vietnam, he insisted that "a university which has been politically programmed . . . becomes the very antithesis of what an institution of higher learning should be — even if the particular dogma espoused is considered at the moment to be eternal truth." In sum the address was

28. Quoted in James Miller, *"Democracy is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 292.

29. For a brief overview of the campus uprisings and their impact on the American scene see William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 404–409.

30. Morris Abram, "Inaugural Address," Brandeis University, October 6, 1968, box 2, Morris Abram Papers, Emory University.

a full-throated defense of the liberal creed and a shot across the bow to student activists. Abram was proud of the speech, which he claimed to have composed without the help of a speechwriter and used it as a measuring rod to judge the integrity of his actions during the Ford Hall occupation and its aftermath.³¹

Abram repeated these sentiments in interviews with Brandeis' student newspaper, *The Justice*, and in meetings with students, where they were generally received with skepticism and disdain. His more articulate interlocutors countered that academia was inherently politicized. They charged — somewhat unfairly, given his public opposition to the Vietnam war — that Abram was merely an apologist for maintaining the status quo. Some defended the prioritization of activism on moral and social justice grounds.³²

Yet even prior to the outbreak of student demonstrations, Abram's perception of the job of a university president was misguided. He fancied himself as a modern day "Renaissance prince." His model was Franklin Ridgeway Aydelotte, the president of Swarthmore College from 1921 to 1940, who likely first came to Abram's attention through his published history of the Rhodes scholarship program. An early Rhodes scholar himself (1905–07), Aydelotte's plan for Swarthmore was to use it as an American laboratory where he could "put the Oxford idea into practice."³³ Years after Abram's departure from Brandeis, he still spoke wistfully about Aydelotte's typical day at Swarthmore, which allowed time for reading the *New York Times* over a leisurely breakfast, meditative walks through his rose garden, and afternoon naps.³⁴

Wien apparently contributed to Abram's false impression by not leveling with him in advance about the university's shaky financial situation. Nevertheless, even a cursory conversation with Sachar should

31. *Ibid*; John Fenton, "Abram, Pledging Student Role, In Installed as Second Brandeis Head," *New York Times*, October 7, 1968, 30; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 928–929.

32. David Pitt, "Opinion: On Politicization," *The Justice* (October 8, 1968). See also, "Morris B. Abram accepts Post as University President; U.N. Delegate, N.Y. Lawyer to Take Office in September," *The Justice* (February 27, 1968); Ellen Shaffer and Jon Quint, "President, in Interview, Calls for Communication," *The Justice* (September 17, 1968); Morris Abram talk with Chuck Eisenberg, Allen Alter and other students in East Lounge, April 14, 1969; "Quotes from Morris B. Abram," n.d., Box 13, Morris B. Abram Papers, EU-MARBL.

33. According to a *Time* magazine profile, Aydelotte believed that "Democracy was a good thing, but applied to education it dragged the able men down. Dr. Aydelotte would relieve democracy from mediocrity." See, "Rhodesmen at Swarthmore," *Time* (June 5, 1933).

34. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 27, 1976, p. 987.

have disabused Abram from the misconception that the routine of a Brandeis University president was even remotely like Aydelotte's. He did not initially grasp the significance of the difference between Brandeis' paltry \$20 million endowment in 1968, compared to Wesleyan's robust \$200 million or even Swarthmore's roughly \$60 million.³⁵

As it turned out, Abram was gifted at playing the dual roles of ambassador and fundraiser. The university raised more money in 1969 than it had in any previous year. But his schedule crisscrossing the country was grueling. One month in 1969 he only spent nine nights in his own bed. He was also unnerved by the pressure of raising an estimated \$5 million a year for operating costs alone. Indeed, his concern during the campus unrest was its potential impact on fundraising. He hated schmoozing, hobnobbing, elbow rubbing and groveling for money, and he felt morally compromised when he bent admission standards for the children of wealthy donors.³⁶ Abram felt temperamentally unsuited for the demands of the job.

Sachar had not truly gone from Brandeis when he stepped down as president. Concerned about losing Sachar's connections to philanthropists, the trustees agreed to retain him in the role of chancellor, with a campus office and secretary. But this arrangement quickly became a source friction. Wien assured Abram that Sachar would confine his role to fundraising. But seasoned observers of university politics warned Abram against consenting to the deal. Their intuition was correct as the founding president would not willingly extricate himself from the day-to-day affairs of the university that he built, and sought to undermine Abram with the faculty and board. To complicate matters, all but one member of his administrative team were holdovers from the Sachar administration, and Abram doubted their loyalties. Abram's bitterness toward Sachar was still evident long after his resignation. "I think he's just as evil as Richard Nixon," Abram declared in 1976, apparently still smarting from his wounds. "Principle didn't amount to anything, it was his reputation and his standing."³⁷

35. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, p. 917; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 27, 1976, 1002; Richard Walton, *Swarthmore College: An Informal History* (Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1981), 81; Morris Abram, "Address on Admissions," Fall 1969, Box 1, Abram L. Sachar Chancellorship Papers, ACS-BU.

36. Abram, *The Day is Short*, 191.

37. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, p. 918-920, 932-935, 938; Abram, *The Day is Short*, 168-171.

African American Students at Brandeis

Among the challenges that Abram contended with early on was a basket of issues related to African Americans on campus, including recruitment, financial aid, black studies,³⁸ and intervention strategies for educationally disadvantaged African American youth. The King assassination did not precipitate violence at Brandeis but it shook up many faculty and students, and turned a spotlight on the university's efforts to promote racial and social justice through its programs and recruitment efforts.

There had been a small black student presence at Brandeis virtually from the outset. An *Ebony* magazine article in 1952 lauded the university for its race and religion blind admissions process. *Ebony* suggested that black students were seamlessly integrated into campus life, playing varsity sports, socializing with white students in the cafeteria, and living with white roommates in university dormitories. The magazine even hinted at romantic relationships between black and white students, printing a publicity photo of an interracial student couple dancing together at a school party. (The photo was bound to raise many eyebrows, even outside of the South – anti-miscegenation laws were still on the books in twenty-nine states in 1952.) Eight black students were enrolled at Brandeis that year, according to the magazine. Yet despite *Ebony's* glowing report, the numbers grew only modestly over the next decade-and-a-half, to fifty-eight in the 1967–68 school year.³⁹

The extent of Brandeis student and faculty participation in civil rights activism in the early and mid-1960s mirrored that of their counterparts on other elite northeastern and west coast campuses. A few faculty and alumni occupied leadership positions in organizations like the Congress on Racial Equality and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and according to the student newspaper, some undergraduates

38. The proposal under debate was the creation of an African and Afro-American Studies department. But Abram used the terms “black studies” and “African and Afro-American Studies,” interchangeably in his memoir. See, *The Day is Short*, 171, 183, 184, 188, 190.

39. “Brandeis University: New Jewish-Founded School in Massachusetts Preaches and Practices Full Democracy,” *Ebony* (February 1952), 59–63; Stephen J. Whitfield, *Brandeis University at the Beginning* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 2010), 97–98; “Brandeis’ Actions in Meeting Black Students’ Needs,” Attachment to Morris Abram, “Open Letter to the Brandeis Community,” January 31, 1969, Box: Student Activism at Brandeis, Gordon Fellman Papers, ASC-BU. Brandeis’ overall enrollment also increased during these years, thereby blunting the impact of the increase in African American students on the overall racial makeup of the student body.

demonstrated their commitment through participation in pickets, protest marches, inner-city work, and black voter registration efforts.⁴⁰

The radicalization of the civil rights movement in the mid-late 1960s and its growing emphasis on black nationalism and self-actualization posed some challenges to white students whose sympathy for the overall goal of racial equality remained intact. A collection of Brandeis student essays on race relations from the late 1960s suggests that some who were predisposed to civil rights activism were hurt and even confused by calls for their exclusion by supporters of Black Power, while others professed an understanding of the goals of empowerment and racial pride. For a few, the rebuffing of their overtures prompted introspection about their own middle class upbringings both in reference to their political liberalism and their ability to appreciate the perspective of their black schoolmates.⁴¹

Black students also struggled to negotiate their attraction to black separatism and their matriculation at a predominately white university, often as beneficiaries of financial aid. African American students often expressed broad sympathy for the socio-economic goals of the Black Power movement. One black student, A.C., who self-identified as “a black who can pass,” and claimed to have many white friends, wrote of being radicalized by their treatment at the hands of racist whites while registering voters in Mississippi. Attempting to reconcile a growing support for black nationalism and separatism while continuing relationships with white friends at Brandeis, and elsewhere, the student concluded: “Those whites who know the Negro today on a human, personal level will understand, will know why militant black solidarity is required. There is no need for the great white friend to say ‘I forgive you.’ The Negro must group together for power, for psychological release. There is nothing to forgive and if the white truly understands, he will know this.”⁴²

Many of the black students supported “militant black solidarity,” on the grounds that societal change required an assertion of power. “Social justice itself depends on power because people with power decide what is just for whom,” one student explained, adding that, “The riots prob-

40. Miyuki Kita, “Seeking Justice: The Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, and Jews at Brandeis University,” *Nanzan Review of American Studies* 31 (2009), 106–111.

41. American Civilization 2a, student autobiographical statements on race issues, 1968–69, Lawrence Fuchs Paper, ASC-BU. The names and genders of the students were redacted by Fuchs prior to submitting the papers to the Archive.

42. *Ibid.* While the papers, which were written for an American Civilization course offered during the 1968–69 academic year by Prof. Lawrence Fuchs are not necessarily representative of the student body as a whole, they provide a rare and unmediated glimpse into student attitudes on race relations and civil rights.

ably did much more to get poverty programs going than years of less dynamic displays and discussions.” They also extolled the movement’s positive effects on the African American psyche. Yet, a few were critical of the Black Power movement’s more extreme manifestations. One student criticized CORE National Chairman Roy Innis, for setting himself up as a “gatekeeper,” excluding some black people from the category “black” because they were too bourgeois or light-skinned rather than advancing an inclusive definition of blackness. Interestingly, none of the black essay writers singled out Jews for criticism.⁴³

The University as an institution entered into social justice work in 1964 when it became a pilot site for Upward Bound, a summer education program, initially funded by the Carnegie Corporation, designed to help prepare low income, rural and at risk youth for college.⁴⁴ According to author J. Anthony Lukas, Upward Bound “grew out of Brandeis’ concern that it was becoming a Jewish ghetto, drawing primarily from middle class Jews from Great Neck or Brookline.” Brandeis faculty and administrators were struggling with how to ease the path to college for academically promising yet poorly prepared candidates. He claimed that fourteen out of fifteen African American undergraduates enrolled at the university in 1963–64 were to some degree in academic jeopardy. Professor William Goldsmith, a longtime labor and civil rights champion who exemplified a tradition of scholar-activism at the university, was instrumental in developing and bringing the program to Brandeis. Writing in 1968, Goldsmith and a colleague pointed to Upward Bound’s “remarkable results in ‘turning kids on’ to higher education. Immersed in a college atmosphere, challenged by exceptionally talented teachers and tutors, students with miserable records can suddenly come to intellectual life.”⁴⁵

Some who matriculated at Brandeis continued to struggle. By 1967–68, faculty and administrators close to the Upward Bound program were

43. *Ibid.* While it is possible that they censored themselves knowing that Fuchs was Jewish, his skin color did not inhibit them from expressing hostility for white people.

44. Eighteen pilot Upward Bound programs were authorized in 1965 under the federal Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The program was later expanded and placed under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and is today administered as one of the Federal TRIO programs. See, Margaret Cahalan and Thomas Curtin, *A Profile of the Upward Bound Program, 2000–2001* (Washington: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2004), 1–2. <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/ubprofile-00-01.pdf>. Accessed June 7, 2011.

45. J. Anthony Lukas, *Don’t Shoot — We are your Children!* (New York: Random House, 1971), 98; “Obituary: William M. Goldsmith,” *Martha’s Vineyard Times* (March 25, 2010); John H. Clarke and William H. Goldsmith, “A Transitional Year Program for Boston: Proposal,” April 1968, William Goldsmith Papers, ASC-BU.

exploring ways to address the program's shortcomings. But it was the King assassination that galvanized the group to action and provided sufficient momentum for the introduction of a more ambitious year-long pre-college program offering promising young people a "fresh chance to escape the shadow of their past failures and frustrations."⁴⁶

Pressure also came from the African American students, themselves reeling from the assassination. The outcome of an impromptu gathering on the night of the murder was a list a fourteen "demands," which were presented four days later by representatives of the Afro-American Society (Afro) to Sachar. Chief among them were the establishment of an African and Afro-American studies program, the creation of ten Martin Luther King scholarships for black students, increased recruitment of black students, and an initiative to hire black faculty and administrators.⁴⁷

The Afro representatives heard Sachar consent to their demands, although the outgoing president later insisted that he declined to give them an iron clad guarantee. He assured them that the "proposals," as Sachar preferred to label Afro's demands, "would receive the most sympathetic consideration." Abram later complained that Sachar was obfuscating. "He knew someone else would have to cover his promissory notes."⁴⁸

Whether one chooses to characterize the university's response as laden with fear and "Jewish guilt," as one faculty member suggested, or induced by a moment of clarity, the extraordinary atmosphere engendered by the King assassination clearly emboldened both the black students and faculty activists like Goldsmith, while rendering university officials uncommonly receptive to proposals and programs that might otherwise have been dismissed as financially untenable, academically risky and procedurally out of order. It is in this context that one should understand the administration and faculty's decision to approve a hastily developed plan to establish a year-long remedial program to prepare academically disadvantaged high school graduates for college.⁴⁹

What became known as the Transitional Year Program (TYP), emerged from an idea developed by physics professor Christoph Hohenemser and his students, which was refined and implemented by Goldsmith and faculty members Jacob Cohen (American Studies), Robert Lange

46. John H. Clarke and William H. Goldsmith, "A Transitional Year Program for Boston: Proposal"; William Goldsmith, "Transitional Year Program Memorandum," n.d. (c. May 1968), Box 1, William Goldsmith Papers, ASC-BU.

47. J. Anthony Lukas, *Don't Shoot — We are your Children!*, 109–110.

48. Abram Sachar to Morris Abram, November 14, 1968, Box 26, Sachar Presidential Papers, ASC-BU; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, p. 929–30; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 171.

49. Jacob Cohen, interview with the author, November 5, 2009.

(Physics) and Robert Seeley (Mathematics). From the outset, the goals of the program aimed to counter the perceived limitations of Upward Bound. Establishing a full year intensive college preparatory program in a boarding environment removed from “home conditions which in many cases is partly responsible for their academic problems” would allow the university to more effectively do its part to “repair the damage done by the primary and secondary education establishment in America.”⁵⁰

Goldsmith and his colleagues also hoped to utilize TYP as a vehicle for increasing black enrollment at Brandeis. Goldsmith acknowledged that most of the Upward Bound graduates were still unable to “satisfy even the considerably relaxed standards under which Brandeis has accepted disadvantaged students in the recent past.” He added that “with hundreds of colleges now bidding like so many football coaches for the soul of this cruelly circumscribed pool of talent,” Brandeis would probably be unable to increase its black population without implementing a remedial preparation program like TYP or dropping its admission standards altogether, a step that he opposed.⁵¹

What stands out about the implementation of TYP is the swiftness with which the faculty acted and the willingness of many to make personal sacrifices in order to see it to fruition. Since the university's budget was already set for the following academic year, the faculty voted to solicit donations from among itself and other members of the community to ensure a September 1968 start date. Many faculty members offered to contribute a minimum of 1% their salary, with donations averaging in the two hundred dollar range. When a hoped for grant from the federal government did not materialize, the balance was covered through Sachar's fundraising efforts, allowing the program to commence on schedule with a cohort of twenty-six students.⁵²

TYP also garnered support from incoming president Abram. “I was delighted to be informed of the faculty response to the transitional year program,” Abram wrote to Goldsmith in mid-June 1968. “I, of course, will want to make a contribution and we shall discuss that when we

50. “The Transitional Year Program: From Great Beginnings,” *Commitment TYP* (Spring 2007), 4; William Goldsmith, “Transitional Year Program Memorandum.”

51. William Goldsmith, “Transitional Year Program Memorandum”; John Clarke and William H. Goldsmith, “A Transitional Year Program for Boston: Proposal”; William Goldsmith to Thomas Billings, June 12, 1968, Box 1, William Goldsmith Papers, ASC-BU.

52. “The Transitional Year Program: From Great Beginnings,” 4; William Goldsmith to Thomas Billings, June 12, 1968; William Goldsmith, “Transitional Year Program Memorandum,” n.d.; William Goldsmith to Morris Abram, June 13, 1968, Box 1, William Goldsmith Papers, ACS-BU.

meet.” Abram even expressed hope that TYP would serve as a model for other universities, that “if Brandeis could be instrumental in providing some answers to help the underachievers or non-achievers in the schools of the central city, it would have made a seminal contribution to an awesome problem.”⁵³

Yet, later, in a 1976 oral history conducted by historian Eli Evans and in his 1982 memoirs, Abram characterized TYP as “dreadful,” and “a bad idea whose time had come.” He wrote dismissively about the first crop of students: “A few of them were talented and ambitious. The rest were there to enjoy and exploit the middle class whites who seemed to feel exposure to the ghetto was in itself educational.” And he derisively characterized the program’s faculty as “ben[ding] over backward to accommodate illiteracy.”⁵⁴ Abram soured on TYP only after many of its students were implicated in the Ford Hall takeover. As we shall see, this is one of a number of discrepancies between Abram’s memoirs and the documentary record. In his memoir, Abram framed his hostility to TYP in terms of his outspoken opposition to affirmative action. But TYP cannot be categorized as quota-based program since it comprised a separate university division and did not directly impact undergraduate admissions. Nor did Abram originally view it as such. In fact, as his letter to Goldsmith indicates, Abram had no qualms in the summer of 1968 about providing a compensatory boost to prospective students who demonstrated intellectual promise but lacked the necessary discipline and academic background to succeed at Brandeis. Acknowledging his earlier support for this form of affirmative action, in 1980, he explicitly differentiated it from what he termed “racial preferences” in admissions and hiring.⁵⁵

Sachar’s Costly “Promissory Notes”

The swift implementation of the TYP proposal, along with immediate steps that were taken to strengthen African American student and staff recruitment, starkly contrasted with the dithering and obstruction that held up the creation of an African and Afro-American studies concentration. Shortly after his meeting with the Afro representatives, Sachar

53. Morris Abram to William Goldsmith, June 21, 1968, Box 1, William Goldsmith Papers, ACS-BU.

54. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, p. 924; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 190.

55. Morris Abram, “Liberalism & the Jews: A Symposium,” *Commentary* (January 1980), 14–16.

appointed a joint faculty-student-administration advisory committee on Afro-American affairs. But five months later, the group had still not acted on a proposal to create the concentration, leaving members of Afro understandably discouraged.⁵⁶

Much to Abram's chagrin, their frustration was publicly aired during his inauguration celebration. In an effort to signal his support for furthering King's integrationist civil rights agenda in the wake of the assassination and the riots, he arranged for King's widow, Coretta Scott King, to address the celebrants. Given his work on behalf of desegregation and his close ties to the King family, Abram felt that his civil rights credentials were established. Radicalized African American students and their white supporters, however, were not impressed. As part of the inauguration festivities, a public debate was staged on the merits of black separatism between civil rights leader Bayard Rustin and Fairleigh Dickinson economics professor Robert S. Browne, with Brandeis senior and former Afro co-chair Phyllis Raynor, '69, acting as a respondent.⁵⁷ In her remarks, Raynor pointed to the university's failure to implement the black studies concentration as an illustration of the futility of working within the prevailing white-dominated system. She stridently blamed the delay on "institutional racism," endemic to Brandeis. When Abram rose to rationalize what he characterized as "procedural delays," Raynor exploded. There would be no progress as long "men like you, sir, I repeat, men like you" were in the seats of power, she charged, storming off the stage and out of the auditorium, followed by an entourage of Afro members.⁵⁸

Abram was "horrified" and later pleaded ignorance about the assurances that Sachar had apparently given to Afro. He subsequently held a tense meeting with members of Afro in which he tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade them that the integration of African and African American studies into the humanities curriculum as a whole would make a significant contribution to academia and have a far greater impact on

56. Morris Abram, early draft of *New York Times* article, "Eleven Days at Brandeis," n.d. (c. February 1969), Box 13, Morris B. Abram Papers, Emory University Manuscript, Archives & Rare Book Library (EU-MARBL); William Goldsmith to Peter Diamandopoulos, "Memorandum on the History of TYP," n.d. (c. 1969), Box 1, William Goldsmith Papers, ASC-BU.

57. Browne, a founder of the Black Economic Research Center and advocate of economic investment in traditionally black neighborhoods, argued in favor of separation as a means of promoting self-help, while Rustin, a leading civil rights strategist, advocate of non-violence resistance, and organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, argued for integration.

58. Merline Price, "Brown [sic!], Rustin Debate Separatism; Delays in Afro Programs Discussed," *Justice* (October 8, 1968), 4.

the educational experience of Brandeis students than a separate black studies department. Generally speaking, Abram was a supporter of a core curriculum. “What I was saying was something far more advanced than was being proposed by these black militants,” he complained in his 1976 oral history. “Jesus, you would have thought that I had committed some kind of racist crime. They didn’t listen and all they wanted was black professors, regardless of training, discipline and competence, black courses, regardless of content. And these little children, as they were, would get up and make speeches about this is a racist institution and so forth and so on.”⁵⁹

Years later, Abram elaborated on this incident in his 1982 memoir, explaining that he considered African and Afro-American or black studies (he used the terms interchangeably) “a very valid and constructive graduate enterprise at the few institutions equipped for the task.” But at Brandeis, “a black studies program would merely isolate their culture, kick it upstairs as it were. . . . I thought undergraduate concentration in black studies a fraud and a cop-out by whites through re-segregation of blacks in a two-tier educational system.”⁶⁰

But, once again, Abram’s published recollections do not match the historical record. Abram publically expressed his support for an African and Afro-American studies program in the course of his comments at the Rustin-Browne debate. While one might be tempted to dismiss this as public posturing, his private papers confirm his early support for African and Afro-American studies. Shortly after the Ford Hall episode, he wrote down his version of the events, which became the basis for a *New York Times Magazine* article, “The Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President’s Chair.” In these reflections, he offered a supportive but more nuanced view:

Academically, Afro-American and African studies have great validity. We have made terrible mistakes in our schools, letting our children believe, for example, that there was only one kind of mythology — Greek and Roman — and omitting any mention of the rich and varied mythologies of the African tribes. Where these studies threaten to become weapons of political power or patronage or means to easy grades, however, then faculties and administrators must be firm. Any attempt to make the Afro department a base for political propaganda or dogma is intolerable.⁶¹

59. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 929–931.

60. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 172.

61. Merline Price, “Brown, Rustin Debate Separatism; Delays in Afro Programs Discussed,” 4; Morris Abram, loose pages from early draft of *New York Times Magazine* article, n.d., Box 13, Morris B. Abram Papers, EU-MARBL.

The context of his personal reflections on Ford Hall, clearly demonstrate that he was prepared to support an academically rigorous and not overtly politicized *undergraduate* department at *Brandeis* in African and Afro-American studies. Indeed, this is consistent with other public statements he made during this period, including in his inaugural address.⁶²

In fact, behind the scenes, Abram actually applied pressure on the dean of the faculty and the responsible faculty committee to endorse the African and Afro-American studies concentration proposal and promptly bring the matter to a faculty vote.⁶³ Abram had no more patience for academic politics, and what he termed the “customary lassitude” of the faculty, than he did for “little children” pontificating about racial injustice. Some faculty members, in turn, interpreted Abram’s impatience as a symptom of laziness. Sachar was a bulldozer with scant regard for the views of his faculty, but he was industrious, almost relentless. Aydelotte’s tenure at Swarthmore was an inadequate model for a university presidency in the turbulent late-1960s.⁶⁴

Abram’s difficulties were due largely to problems of style rather than substance. Afro student leader Alexander Aikens III, ‘71, recalled that there was “an almost immediate chemical reaction” between Abram and the black students. Raynor’s outburst aside, members of Afro conceded that the new president could not be held responsible for the sins of the previous administration. But in their initial meetings with Abram, they were repelled by his paternalistic tone and lawyerly mind-set. Abram’s description of those early meetings essentially confirmed the students’ perception. He was dismayed that his civil rights bona fides and ties to the King family failed to impress the students.⁶⁵

62. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 172; William Honan, “Morris Abram is Dead at 81; Rights Advocate Led Brandeis,” *New York Times* (March 17, 2000); Morris Abram, “Inaugural Address,” Oct. 6, 1968, Box 2, Morris B. Abram Papers, EU-MARBL.

63. Notes from the faculty’s Education Policies Committee suggest that members were engaging with substantive academic issues rather than idly stonewalling. The student-faculty committee reasonably recommended creating separate concentrations in African and Afro-American studies. The fate of the proposed Afro-American Studies concentration became subsumed in a larger discussion about whether to create an American Civilization Department, where the concentration would be housed. It is less clear why the committee did not move ahead with the proposed interdisciplinary African Studies concentration. Lawrence Fuchs to Educational Policies Committee, n.d. (October 1968), box 16, Morris B. Abram Papers, EU-MARBL.

64. Morris Abram, early draft of *New York Times* article, “Eleven Days at Brandeis”; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 929–931; Jacob Cohen, interview with the author, November 5, 2009.

65. Alex Aikens interview with the author, September 21, 2010; Morris Abram, early draft of *New York Times* article, “Eleven Days at Brandeis.”

Aikens suggested that Abram's difficulty in connecting with the Afro students was largely a function of cultural differences. Abram was accustomed to interacting with southern blacks, while the members of Afro hailed primarily from Boston and other northeastern cities. The most convincing piece of evidence substantiating Aikens' view was the peculiar rapport that Abram developed with Afro leader Roy DeBerry, '70, a native of Mississippi. "He and I understood each other about as well as anybody on that campus understood each other," Abram said of his relationship with DeBerry. "There was between us a common experience – the South. I had more roots in common with him than with any New York Jew; and he himself was closer to me than he could ever have been to some northern blacks fighting by his side, and perhaps egging him on." Abram was revealing more in this comment than he probably intended. For DeBerry's bond with Abram was based in part on the president's personal intervention with the Mississippi draft board to keep the lad out of Vietnam. Abram's show of magnanimity and personal interest in DeBerry, which he undoubtedly experienced as genuine, could also be read as rehearsing a familiar Southern white paternalism towards "good" (i.e., submissive) blacks.⁶⁶

Fiscal matters were a perpetual concern for Abram, who found Brandeis in a far more precarious financial situation than he had been led to believe by Wien. While Abram felt Sachar tied the hands of the new administration with his reassurances to the Afro representatives, there is no evidence from his correspondence and writings from the period that he was opposed in principle to any of Afro's demands. But Abram expressed reservations about earmarking a disproportionate number of the university's financial aid dollars specifically for black recipients. Furthermore, he suggested that since the vast majority of black students

66. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 937–38; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 185–186. Abram's approach to (and frustration with) Afro was likely conditioned by his southern upbringing. It is helpful to recall that the most common and significant relationships between Jews and blacks in the South were commercial. As historian Clive Webb observed, if black customers appreciated Jewish merchants' willingness to afford them "both credit and basic courtesy, the relationship virtually never became social." Jewish anxiety about their own social status in the South only reinforced their resolve to observe the color barrier and maintain their distance from their black customers and employees. Thus, the asymmetrical power dynamic between the two groups endured with each defensively falling back on default behaviors. Jewish shopkeepers and employers were often paternalistic while black customers and employees were habitually submissive. Clive Webb, "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth Century South," in Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark Greenberg (eds.), *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 192–93; Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind*, 33–37.

required generous financial aid packages, and the university had a finite financial aid budget, Brandeis could not afford to grow its African American student body as quickly as some would have liked. While financial aid data broken down by race is unavailable for the 1968–69 school year, an address that Abram made to the trustees in the autumn of 1969 cites statistics from 1969–70. Abram expressed satisfaction that 43 African Americans matriculated in the 1969 freshman class (as compared to 9 in the graduating class), while pointing out that they received 32% of the total available financial aid for students in their cohort. The average grant was \$3,200. Only five out of the forty-three were paying full tuition. He contended that if Brandeis were to double the number of black students in the 1970–71 freshman class, the university would either need to commit almost 70% of its available aid to these students “or their letters of admission would be the cruelest of frauds.”⁶⁷

Abram reaffirmed the university's commitment to “a representative student body” reflecting the racial, religious, cultural and economic diversity of American society, while eschewing quotas. (Privately, he characterized the student body, which was about 75% Jewish, as “highly nervous and somewhat inbred.”) But he added: “We must now be careful that we not distort our perspectives by applying our limited financial aid funds in such a way that Brandeis becomes a university of rich whites and poor blacks.” An unbalanced financial aid policy, he warned, would potentially heighten racial and social tensions on campus while denying spots to academically deserving working class and lower middle class whites, including many Jews. Surely, Brandeis was far from the only university to struggle with balancing diversity and instituting quotas. But as an institution that was founded in part as a response to the de-facto quota system that penalized Jews at other schools, Brandeis was especially allergic to any policy that overtly disadvantaged its Jewish base.⁶⁸

The Ford Hall Occupation

To the casual observer in the Fall of 1968 it appeared that Brandeis was making good on Sachar's promissory notes to its black student body. The advent of TYP, the hiring of two African American professors, the implementation of a concerted recruitment strategy including the deployment of two African American students as part-time recruiters into targeted communities, and the increase in financial aid to black students,

67. Morris Abram, “Address on Admissions,” Fall 1969.

68. *Ibid*; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 920.

demonstrated a genuine commitment to address the concerns that Afro representatives articulated to Sachar in the wake of the King assassination. Progress was also being made on the most important outstanding academic issue. After some initial stalling, administration and student prodding compelled the faculty to act on plans for the introduction of a black studies concentration. The program in African and Afro-American studies was slated to be introduced in the 1969–70 academic year.⁶⁹

In light of this progress, the occupation of Ford Hall came as a complete surprise to Abram and his team. At around 2 pm on January 8th, the normally placid university's central switchboard office in Ford Hall was thrown into turmoil. A group of about fifteen black students forced their way in and politely, but firmly demanded that the staff immediately vacate the premises. The startled operators complied and were escorted from the room. Groups of black students then fanned out throughout Ford Hall, clearing offices and classrooms. Within an hour, the students, whose numbers had swelled to about sixty-five, controlled the entire building, including the physics department laboratories and computer center, located in the Sydeman Hall annex, which housed a recently installed, state-of-the-art IBM 1130 computer. Later that evening, the protesters rechristened the building "Malcolm X University," and hung a banner with that name from a second floor window.⁷⁰

69. Richard Galant, "Black Studies Plans Win EPC Approval," *The Justice* (October 22, 1968); Richard Weckstein, "Letter to the Editor," *The Justice* (October 22, 1968); Joseph Berliner, "Letter to the Editor," *The Justice* (October 29, 1968); "Full Faculty Approves Black, Trustees' Plans," *The Justice* (December 17, 1968). The programs in African and Afro-American studies drew some opposition from faculty members who argued that concentrations and departments should be limited to disciplines with discrete methodologies or traditions of analysis. A proposal for the establishment of an interdisciplinary American Civilization concentration, which was similarly on the table, was deemed equally objectionable. But none of the opponents publicly broached a glaring weakness of their argument, i.e., the existence at Brandeis of an interdisciplinary department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. In any case, despite the principled objections, the faculty's Educational Policy Committee voted to approve plans for the concentrations in mid-October; they won final approval at a faculty meeting held shortly before the Christmas break. Given the political sensitivities involved and the active support that the concentrations garnered from both the president and the dean of faculty, the outcome of the votes were never seriously in doubt.

70. Jon Quint, "Ford Occupied; Talks Progress," *The Justice* (January 10, 1969); Arlene Wolfson, "Installation to Begin on New Computer," *The Justice* (October 22, 1968); Morris Abram, "Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President's Chair," *New York Times Magazine* (February 16, 1969); Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 182; Remembering Ford & Sydeman Halls: General History and Architecture, Brandeis University Archives & Special Collections website. Accessed on August 18, 2011. <http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/events/ford/history/index.html>

The takeover was largely peaceful.⁷¹ Administrators attempted to minimize the potential for conflict by ordering campus police not to enter the building. They also contacted the New England Telephone Co. and arranged to have the university's main phone number disconnected and outgoing long-distance calls halted. President Abram, meanwhile, who was returning from a fundraising trip to New York, was only made aware of the situation by his driver who met him at Logan Airport.⁷²

Upon returning to campus, the president conferred with his senior advisors and members of the faculty senate. At roughly the same time, Afro leaders were composing a list of ten "non-negotiable" demands, which were later announced at a press conference and conveyed to the administration by a reporter from the campus radio station. In some cases the demands merely recapitulated those that were made to Sachar the previous spring, for example, more black professors and scholarships for black students. Others represented an escalation. The students now demanded black directors for TYP and Upward Bound programs and "year-round" recruitment of black students under the leadership of a full time black admissions officer. They further insisted on doubling the size of TYP in the 1969-70 academic year. Most crucially, they demanded "an African studies department with the power to hire and fire," and "an independent budget of its own," not merely a concentration. They also demanded that Afro be allowed to select the chair of the proposed department. These final conditions, which topped their list, proved to be the most controversial because they impinged on the traditional prerogatives of the faculty and interfered with academic freedom.⁷³

Perhaps, because the occupation was unexpected, Abram and other university leaders were predisposed to explain it away as a response to extrinsic forces. This tendency was reinforced by conspiracy mongering by agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. J. Edgar Hoover's agents remained in close contact with university presidents in the late-1960s. William Sullivan, head of the FBI's domestic intelligence division, warned Abram in late-1968 that Brandeis would be the next target of a black student take-over. "Brandeis was a sitting duck . . . because of its Jewish connections," Abram recalled Sullivan telling him. "Jews were

71. In an anomalous incident, physics professor Lawrence Kirsh, who was concerned about the security of the computer, nearly came to blows with a student who denied him access to the building and verbally abused him. But the altercation was defused by another student. Jon Quint, "Ford Occupied; Talks Progress."

72. Jon Quint, "Ford Occupied; Talks Progress"; Morris Abram, "Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President's Chair."

73. "The Ten Demands," *The Justice* (January 14, 1969); Morris Abram, "Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President's Chair."

very committed to black causes and might be expected to be tender in dealing with a black takeover.” At the time of the call, Abram had not taken Sullivan’s warning seriously. Confronting the Ford Hall occupation, just a few weeks later, he could not help but reconsider it.⁷⁴

In the aftermath of the Ford Hall occupation, Abram suggested it had been triggered by a campus speaking engagement on the eve of the takeover by two protest movement leaders from San Francisco State University, faculty member Arlene Daniels and graduate student and black student union leader Bill Middleton.⁷⁵ SFU was the site of a protracted student strike organized by the Black Student Union and a coalition of other minority student groups. Afro members insisted, however, that plans for some sort of action were elaborated as early as November 1968, and a targeted plan of action involving the occupation of Ford Hall was developed by members of Afro’s executive committee three days prior to the San Francisco State forum. At most, an incendiary speech by Middleton and his subsequent meeting with black students after the official forum persuaded Afro to implement its plan without delay. The San Francisco State forum was “the match that lit the gassy rags,” protester Alex Aikens explained, emphasizing that the Ford Hall takeover was an inevitability.⁷⁶

But the timing of the building takeover was influenced as much by the school calendar as Middleton’s exhortations. Faculty members and students described a general sense of unrest, particularly among TYP students. With final exams only weeks away, they were increasingly anxious about their ability to keep up with their academic work. An embittered Abram eventually came to accept the linkage between the occupation and the looming exams. Indeed, it definitively soured him on TYP. Later that spring he and some members of the faculty tried to use it as a pretext to close down the program.⁷⁷

74. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 183.

75. See, for example, Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 941–42.

76. SA, FBI Report, Interview with Unidentified Brandeis Staff Member “X”, April 9, 1969; SA, FBI Report, Interview with Unidentified Individual “Y”, April 9, 1969; SAS, FBI Report, Interview with Unidentified Student “A,” April 1, 1969; SA, FBI Report, Interview with Unidentified Student, “E,” April 8, 1969; SAS, FBI Report, Interview with Unidentified Student, “F,” April 4, 1969, Box 1, Gordon Fellman Papers, ASC-BU; Alex Aikens interview with the author, September 21, 2010.

77. SA, FBI Report, Interview with Unidentified Faculty Member, “1,” April 4, 1969, Box 1, Gordon Fellman Papers; Morris Abram, “Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President’s Chair”; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 943; William Goldsmith to Peter Diamandopoulos, Memorandum on History of TYP.

Two somewhat different motivations for the occupation were presented by the protesters themselves, hinting at the lack of unanimity among them. On a local public television program devoted to the Ford Hall takeover, one of the radicals, Ricardo Millett, a graduate student at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management, insisted that, "It's a simple matter of power. It's the whole way you achieve victory. We have to achieve victory the way we want it. We do not want it handed down to us like, well, this is a piece of pie I'm going to give you because you behave [like] a good boy. And this has been the general way that victory has always been given to the black man. And we're not taking that anymore." Yet on that same program, the chief negotiator for the black students, Randall Bailey, struck a more pragmatic note. The black students were neither interested in perpetrating violence nor provoking it, he stated. In Bailey's mind, the issue at hand was simply about educational relevance, "finally getting recognition that black people in a university are going to have education relevant to themselves." Drawing an explicit contrast between the protests at Brandeis and Columbia University, he added: "This is not an issue of student power."⁷⁸

Millett's concern with redeeming the emasculated black man was a trope that was expressed repeatedly during the eleven-day occupation. Activists included students of both sexes. But the black student population at Brandeis was disproportionately male since the first TYP class was entirely male. When black students spoke about their grievances towards the university they often mentioned petty indignities — mistreatment by the cafeteria staff, repeated identification card checks by campus police, even when they were recognized by the officers — that seemed designed to undermine their self-confidence and remind them that they did not fully belong.⁷⁹ The Ford Hall takeover was viewed by the black students as a badge of self respect.⁸⁰

Interestingly, Abram, too, made the connection between the occupation and black desires to compensate for feelings of inadequacy. In a 1984 oral history for the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Abram's thoughts drifted back to his Brandeis years as the interviewer questioned him about the 1965 Moynihan Report. Its author, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, provoked controversy with his conclusion that the decline of the traditional two-parent family within the

78. "Black Power on University Campuses," *Say Brother*, WGBH Archives. *Say Brother*, which first aired in 1968, was eventually renamed *Basic Black* in 1997 and remains the longest running African American news and public affairs program.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Jacob Cohen, Interview with the author, November 5, 2009.

black community was partially responsible for the persistence of black poverty. Abram believed that Moynihan was “dead right, irrefutable,” and credited him for courageously exposing “a nest of worms.” If black leaders were resistant to Moynihan’s message, he argued, it was because his study had “touch[ed] a deep nerve,” with its implicit criticism of black males for evading their duties as husbands and parents. Implicitly invoking his interactions with Brandeis’ black students, Abram added:

But I have often, as a university president in 1968 and subsequently, listened to black males, and do you ever say to a fellow of yours, “man”? “Man, let’s do this,” “Man, let’s do that.” Every other sentence, “man,” “I got you, man,” “I hear you, man,” “Man, let’s go to town.” That is the discourse, or was the discourse, of the black male on campus in the late sixties. It’s an affirmation that I’m not a boy, I think, and I am a man, the enormous drive for self respect as a male.⁸¹

As Abram and his advisors struggled in the early hours of the takeover to get a handle on the situation, the atmosphere inside Ford Hall was confused.⁸² The growing recognition that the sit-in would be protracted prompted increased concern about securing the building in order to encumber a possible assault by police, and more systematically restrict access to outsiders. Shortly after 10 p.m. on the first night a long chain was coiled around the inside handles of the building’s front doors. Aside from the black students, only a handful of black reporters and Roxbury community leaders were allowed to remain in Ford.⁸³

After initially resisting his advisors’ suggestions that he speak directly with the protesters, Abram abruptly changed his mind and walked over to Ford Hall with Dean of Faculty Peter Diamandoupolis at around 11:30 pm. Abram waited as the chains were unraveled and the door opened. He was led into the building where he met with DeBerry. The encounter, which was caught on camera, was brief but civil.⁸⁴ Abram would later make much of his decision to visit the protesters that first night. “Everybody advised me not to go, that I’d be endangering my life. But I would not allow fear to rule me,” he wrote in his memoir. But

81. Transcript, “Morris Abram Oral History Interview 1,” March 20, 1984, by Michael L. Gillette, LBJ Library. Accessed on May 26, 2014.

82. “Rough Notes of Minutes of Special Faculty Meeting,” January 11, 1969; J. Anthony Lukas, *Don’t Shoot — We are Your Children!*, 112; Alexander Aikens, interview with the author, September 21, 2010.

83. “Rough Notes of Minutes of Special Faculty Meeting,” January 11, 1969; Robert Jordan, “The Sit-In From the Inside: Sleeping, Eating and Talking,” *Boston Globe*, January 10, 1969, p. 1, 2.

84. Jon Quint, “Ford Occupied; Talks Progress”; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 184.

Abram's assistant, Kenneth Sweder, categorically dismissed his old boss's recollection. "Morris never felt in physical danger and his advisors never suggested that he might be in danger by going to Ford Hall," he stated.⁸⁵

It is conceivable that Abram's memory was shaped by his evolving political perspective. At a press conference held in the midst of the crisis, Abram was able to acknowledge "the deep frustration and anger which black students here and all over the country feel at what must seem — and often is — the indifference and duplicity of white men in relation to blacks." He assumed that "the most militant blacks are seeking reparations from the universities for 300 years of societal discrimination," a demand that he found legally dubious. Yet he affirmed that black students' underlying grievances were "very serious . . . very deep, very real, very justified. By the mid-1970s, however, his views had changed. Referring to the Ford Hall protesters, Abram declared: "Truth is they didn't have any real grievances."⁸⁶ Abram's memory could also have been affected by the press coverage. The impression that the protesters were brutish revolutionaries, armed and dangerous, was actively fanned by many in the media. So, too, was the notion that they were being manipulated or even led by outside groups like the Black Panthers.⁸⁷

"Brandeis Would Not be Another Columbia"

One lesson that was uppermost on Abram's mind was the importance of campus unity in the face of the unrest. In his view, Columbia president Grayson Kirk's failure to unite the faculty behind his response to the April 1968 student takeover on that campus, which included the deployment of a thousand police in riot gear to quell the protests, exacerbated the crisis, which culminated with Kirk's resignation four months later. In the critical first hours of the occupation, Abram managed to win the support of the Brandeis faculty and the student council.⁸⁸ "Whatever might happen, Brandeis would not be another Columbia, and no one would accuse me of pitting myself against the rank and file," Abram

85. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 184; Kenneth Sweder, interview with the author, May 6, 2010.

86. Morris Abram, loose pages from early draft of *New York Times Magazine* article; Morris Abram interview with Eli Evans, February 23, 1976, 943.

87. See, for example, Kenneth Gross, "Brandeis Won't Call in Police" *New York Post*, January 13, 1969,

88. Karen Arenson, "Grayson Kirk, 94, President of Columbia During the 1968 Student Protests is Dead," *New York Times*, November 22, 1997; Jon Quint, "Ford Occupied; Talks Progress," *The Justice*, January 10, 1969, 1, 2.

declared.⁸⁹ Abram made a strategic decision to dramatize, rather than downplay, the potential consequences of the takeover. "I think we are at the Rubicon," he exclaimed at the faculty meeting. "I do not myself want to preside over any institution which can be held up for ransom, by force, without votes taken, without logic but by pure seizure. . . . If this is a community, now is the time to demonstrate it."⁹⁰

It is arguable whether the occupation of a single building by a relatively small contingent of students, many of whom were part of the one-year TYP program and arguably marginal to campus life, constituted an existential threat to the university, as Abram suggested. The loss of the communications and technology center surely inconvenienced administrators and some members of the faculty. Moreover, the volatile and fluid nature of the protest presented a realistic threat of property damage and the destruction of faculty research. Some faculty and administrators also feared that the black students would attempt to widen the conflict by enlisting support from activists and community leaders in Roxbury. But there was little indication that the protests would spread to the general student body.

Abram's dire characterization of the crisis was questioned by some friends and associates. For example, shortly after the occupation ended, Abram was dining with psychiatrist W. Walter Menninger, a member of President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, who took him to task for blowing the Ford Hall takeover out of proportion. The violence at Brandeis was "picayune," Menninger scoffed. Abram objected that Brandeis was a young and "fragile" institution. Abram elaborated that he was less afraid of scaring away donors than losing top-notch faculty, who might abandon Brandeis for calmer grounds.⁹¹

Regardless of whether Abram's fears were well-founded, he was correct that much would depend on the actions taken by his administration. His options for hastening its resolution were limited. But the steps he would take would influence whether it remained contained or grew into a general campus-wide revolt.

The goal of campus unity guided a second key decision by Abram: to eschew the use of force unless conditions significantly deteriorated. Abram was reacting to the handling of student protests on other campuses,

89. Jon Quint, "Ford Occupied; Talks Progress"; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 185.

90. "Minutes of Special Faculty Meeting," January 8, 1969, Brandeis University Faculty Meeting Minutes, ASC-BU.

91. "Quotes from Morris B. Abram," n.d., box 13, Morris B. Abram Papers, EU-MARBL.

where the deployment of police fomented and exacerbated divisiveness. Linguistics professor S. Jay Keyser told one newspaper reporter that while faculty opinion varied on the question of an appropriate reaction to the occupation, most hoped to avoid a confrontation between protesters and the police.⁹²

Abram also realized that once the police were called in he would be unable to dictate “the size, tactics or disposition of the forces,” and would effectively lose control of the situation. And he had reason to fear that things could end badly. The university police would be out of its depth, he confided to one interviewer, while the city of Waltham’s police force was “inadequately trained and working class and very hostile to the blacks.”⁹³

There was a further consideration weighing on Abram that militated against the use of force: Brandeis’ Jewish character. Abram alluded to his thinking in the *New York Times Magazine* article, when he acknowledged feeling a special responsibility, because what transpired at Brandeis — “the only secular Jewish-founded university in the United States” — would inevitably reflect upon the entire American Jewish community. Privately, he fleshed out the implications behind these words: “No one wanted a symbolic confrontation of blacks and Jews. To use the police at Brandeis would have been a hell of a situation, black kids bloodied at a Jewish institution.”⁹⁴

Historians Marc Dollinger, Seth Forman, and Cheryl Lynn Greenberg have documented the deterioration of black-Jewish relations in the mid-late 1960s. They noted that even as these tensions became acute when an integrationist civil rights agenda gave way to black separatism, the divergence was decades in the making and stemmed from a fundamentally different attitude towards American liberalism. As Greenberg explained, Jews generally maintained an abiding faith in liberalism, in large part because they did not appreciate how their socio-economic ascent in American society was facilitated by white skin privilege. Thus they continued to support working within the political and legal system to

92. “Rough Notes of Minutes of Special Faculty Meeting,” January 11, 1969, Brandeis University Faculty Meeting Minutes, ASC-BU. Ellen Shaffer, “Faculty, White Students react,” *The Justice*, January 10, 1969, 1.

93. Morris Abram, “Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President’s Chair,” 113; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 940–941. Early on, Abram explored with Massachusetts’ liberal Republican governor Francis Sargent the possibility of calling in the state police. But Sargent feared an overreaction and counseled Abram to explore other options.

94. Morris Abram, “Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President’s Chair,” 113; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 961.

further a moderate and incremental approach to civil rights. Blacks, on the other hand, repeatedly brushing up against the limits of liberalism, were frustrated by the lack of progress on the ground and increasingly embraced black nationalism and militant black solidarity.⁹⁵

Conflicts between the communities, like the 1968 fight over community control in the New York City public schools, were exacerbated by occasional antisemitic and anti-Israel outbursts by some black nationalist intellectuals, artists and community activists. This invective, motivated largely by the fraught economic relationship between Jewish merchants and landlords and black residents in many northern inner city neighborhoods, rendered more difficult efforts by black moderates and Jewish liberals to repair relations. Dollinger pointed out that many Jews continued to sympathize with the African American community, and even professed to understand its turn to ethnic nationalism, with some viewing it through the prism of Zionism. Even as black leaders articulated a militantly separatist ethic, Jewish leaders like Abram, a stalwart supporter of the postwar liberal consensus, struggled to keep integrationism alive. The American Jewish Committee, which Abram headed from 1964–68, clung to its “traditional policy of dialogue and compromise,” and refused to view the Black Power movement as long-term repudiation of “accommodationist strategies.”⁹⁶ It is in this context that we should understand Abram’s invitation to Coretta Scott King, to speak at his Brandeis inauguration. As the wife of the martyred leader of the integrationist wing of the civil rights movement, and a personal friend of Abram, she represented Abram’s unwavering commitment to liberalism, incrementalism and accommodationism.

Abram went out of his way to downplay the notion that the Ford Hall occupation represented a flashpoint in black-Jewish relations. Tensions between the two communities were running high in the wake of the publicity surrounding the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers’ strike, which erupted after a group of mostly Jewish teachers and administrators were summarily dismissed by a locally controlled school board in a largely black section of Brooklyn. The manifestations of racism and antisemitism that came to the fore during that conflict left both communities wounded

95. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 205–234, esp. 206–207. See also, Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 191–213, and Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind: A Crisis of Liberalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 135–180.

96. Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 208–215; Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 193–203.

and deeply suspicious of the other.⁹⁷ Abram, who still had his eye on a New York U.S. Senate seat — did not wish to exacerbate these tensions. Indeed, he acknowledged that many of his Jewish friends and associates were wondering aloud whether the Ford Hall occupation should be seen as part of an escalating black-Jewish quarrel. “I think we must get over the idea that every instance of controversy or conflict between Jew and Negro is an example of either anti-Semitism or white racism. We must remember that many of these incidents are the sparks thrown off by the natural friction of human change.” As a rejoinder to those who stoked fears about pervasive anti-Jewish sentiment among blacks, he invoked Coretta Scott King’s comments at his inauguration. Mrs. King reaffirmed an integrationist vision for America while acknowledging that socio-economic tensions between blacks and Jews were inevitable in the short term, as blacks asserted greater control over their neighborhoods. Black and Jewish leaders would need to be “unrelenting within their own communities to give no quarter to racism,” she insisted, even while marveling at the fairly “limited range” of black antisemitism.⁹⁸

In assiduously avoiding any suggestion that the students’ actions were motivated by antisemitism, Abram was quietly pushing back against elements of the university’s donor base and even members of his board of trustees. Abram generally won high marks for his handling of the crisis from the university’s supporters. However, the confrontation between black students and the administration elicited an emotional response among some American Jews. “I hope and pray that the university will not capitulate to the usurpation now going on by the young army of ‘black Hitlers’ now causing all the trouble at the University,” a businessman from Durham, N.C., wrote to Abram. “This is a well planned strategy, not only against the University, but against the Jews in general.” Another correspondent, Louis Schuker, the principal of Jamaica High School, in Queens, New York, advised Abram to expel the rebellious black students and replace them with more academically qualified, working class Jews, who would be “appreciative of the education offered at Brandeis University,” and who he deemed to be more deserving of the

97. On the Ocean-Hill-Brownsville strike see Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and Melissa Weiner, *Power, Protest and the Public Schools: Jewish and African American Struggles in New York City* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

98. Morris Abram, early draft of *New York Times* article, “Eleven Days at Brandeis,” n.d. (c. February 1969), Box 13, Morris B. Abram Papers, Emory University; Coretta Scott King, “Can There Be One America?” October 4, 1968, box 31, Abram L. Sachar, Chancellor Papers, Brandeis University.

university's largesse. Schuker's letter, which insinuated that Brandeis' efforts to recruit minorities had hurt Jewish applicants, seethed with the kind of resentment that helped to fuel Jewish opposition to affirmative action programs in the 1970s.⁹⁹

Letters like those from the North Carolina merchant and the Queens principal were exceptional for their unconcealed animus, but the premise that the black students were ingrates whose actions rendered them unworthy of support was widely accepted by Abram's correspondents. More typical of the encouragement that he received during this period was a note from Brooklyn attorney Meyer Halperin, a University Fellow and father of two Brandeis alumni. Halperin commended Abram on his steadfastness: "Perhaps the worst thing the University can do would be to capitulate to unjust demands. Not only would this be ruinous to the standards of the University and alienate its supporters, but above all it would be ruinous to the black students themselves."¹⁰⁰

Halperin's warning about alienating donors was not hyperbolic. Brandeis' founders and trustees, many of whom were self-made businessmen, tended to view the black students' protest and demands with little patience or understanding. Privately, they complained to Abram that the university they built should not be in the business of giving "handouts" to black students. "The attitude of these mostly elderly Jews was: 'The Jews made it and why in hell do the blacks not make it on their own,'" Abram explained. "They felt Brandeis was there to help Jews and that money should not be spent on black scholarships."¹⁰¹

One of the more interesting aspects of the Ford Hall takeover is the dichotomy in the way that the two sides viewed the conflict. Despite FBI warnings to Abram that Brandeis was going to be targeted because of its Jewish sponsorship, the protesters did not conceptualize Ford Hall as a black-Jewish confrontation and did not engage with Abram as the leader of a specifically Jewish institution. For example, they did not appeal to Jewish history or values in an attempt to shame the university into a more conciliatory posture, nor did they resort to antisemitic rhetoric when voicing their frustrations. It is true that in symbolically renaming Brandeis "Malcolm X University," the black students were invoking the name of a figure whose public statements suggest that he

99. Israel Freedman to Morris Abram, January 17, 1969; Louis Schuker to Frederick Luddy, January 9, 1969, Box 81, Morris B. Abram Papers, Emory University.

100. Meyer Halperin to Morris Abram, January 15, 1969, Box 81, Morris B. Abram Papers, Emory University.

101. Abram, Oral History, Tape 24, p. 939, in Box 14, Emory University

harbored some antisemitic views.¹⁰² It is unknown whether the students were aware of Malcolm's defamatory remarks about Jews. But there is no evidence to suggest that they chose "Malcolm X University" as an anti-Jewish provocation. Rather they were associating themselves with the most prominent advocate of black nationalism and most vocal critic of King's integrationism. For Abram, on the contrary, Brandeis' symbolic Jewishness was uppermost in his mind as he considered his options and ultimately decided to project firmness but eschew the use of force. He recognized that the Jewish community, and to a certain extent the media and the general public would view the confrontation through that lens.

The perceptual divide can be explained as a reflection of the conflicting narratives that blacks and Jews held about Jewish identity and race in America. In the eyes of most blacks, and the Black Power movement in particular, white power and privilege was ethnically undifferentiated. That certain immigrant groups, including Irish, Italians and Jews initially experienced discrimination in the United States, was relatively immaterial since they were ultimately able to claim their civic whiteness through assimilation. Most Jews in the 1960s and early 1970s, however, were only a generation or two removed from Europe and carried with them strong group memories of persecution and discrimination. They were also living in the shadow of the Holocaust and were only beginning to grapple with its implications for American Jewish life. As Seth Forman explained, "Jewish identity had been so enmeshed with a history of suffering that Jewish leaders and intellectuals found it immensely difficult to envision themselves as privileged whites, the way most Black Power advocates saw them."¹⁰³ Thus, while black students contextualized their struggle at Brandeis within a binary racial paradigm, Jews, including Abram, continued to operate from the perspective of a distinct minority with a precarious foothold in the United States.

"We Simply Didn't Know What Else to Do"

The decision not to call in the police won Abram almost universal praise in the media. It is a little ironic, then, that Abram second guessed his decision almost immediately. Gazing out of his office window in

102. Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1992 [1965]), pp. 209–10, 302–3, 309, 365, 407–8; Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, IL, 1979), pp. 14–15, 176; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York, 2011), pp. 100–1, 134, 179, 246, 367–68, 386.

103. Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind: A Crisis of Liberalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 150.

the main administration building, only yards away from Ford Hall, he weighed his predisposition for law and order against recent television images of violent confrontations at Columbia and the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. "Was this a price which Brandeis University should have to pay?" he wondered.¹⁰⁴ As time passed, his view about the use of force only hardened.¹⁰⁵

Graduate student Ricardo Millett probably did not do the protesters any favors when he proclaimed in a televised interview that the blacks in Ford Hall were "willing to die" for their cause. Millett's assertion was definitely news to many of those inside the building, including Edward Redd, '71. "We took over the building because we simply didn't know what else to do," he later recalled. Aikens agreed, explaining the "rabble rousing" as a bid for attention: "It dawned on us that non-squeaky wheels don't get any grease." The occupation was a gambit to make the Brandeis establishment uncomfortable, to force the administration to take the black students seriously. And, to that extent it was utterly successful; so much so that underneath their tough facades some of the protesters were amazed.¹⁰⁶

In reality, the protesters were an ideologically heterogeneous group. Some had become radicalized and resonated with the black separatist rhetoric of Stokely Carmichael. Others, however, were motivated primarily by parochial interests and desired to reduce the sense of isolation that they felt at Brandeis. The lack of consensus strained the group dynamic and complicated negotiations with the administration. Although their stated demands were fairly straightforward, the various factions spent countless hours arguing over the groups' fundamental aims and the merits of compromise.¹⁰⁷ Many were the first in their families to attend college

104. Larry Van Dyne, "Abram Tactics Avert Violence," *Boston Globe*, January 12, 1969, 2; "Brandeis Balance Sheet," *Boston Herald-Traveler*, January 21, 1969; Morris Abram, "Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President's Chair," 113.

105. Morris Abram, Excerpt of ACPRA [American College Public Relations Association] Speech, July, 1969, box 13, Morris B. Abram Papers, EU-MARBL; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 940. When New Hampshire and Vermont state troopers were called in to break up the occupation of a Dartmouth College building by anti-ROTC protesters, in May 1969, Abram announced that he approved of the action. On the Dartmouth protests see Douglas Robinson, "Troopers Oust Protesters at Dartmouth," *New York Times*, May 8, 1969, 43 and Michael Stern, "Men of Dartmouth are Troubled by Lingering Echoes of Protest," *New York Times*, June 9, 1969, 1.

106. "Student Protests 1969–1970: Brandeis and America," April 12, 2000. Video recording of conference at Brandeis University, ASC-BU; Alexander Aikens III, interview with the author, September 21, 2010; Film: "Ford Hall," 2004, by Seth Bernstein. In possession of Seth Bernstein.

107. "Student Protests 1969–1970: Brandeis and America," April 12, 2000.

and had internalized pressure from their parents and mentors to succeed. "These kids were not radical militants, by and large," Sweder asserted.¹⁰⁸

The same could be said for the student body as a whole. Despite the school's reputation as a hotbed of radicalism, as an incubator for activists like Abbie Hoffman, and Angela Davis, most students kept their distance from Ford Hall. Significantly, the vast majority continued to attend classes during the takeover and did little or nothing to telegraph support for the students holed up in the building. A sympathy sit-in protest in the foyer of a nearby administration building, which housed the president's office, attracted only two or three hundred students out of a population of about 2,600. Similarly, a hunger strike called by the same group of white sympathizers never caught on beyond a small hardcore. One journalist described the situation at Brandeis as a case of "the tail wagging the elephant." Away from media glare the vast majority of students went about their normal routine, preoccupied as much by impending final exams as by the actions of their schoolmates.¹⁰⁹

The growing black nationalist and separatist sentiment of the late-1960s, which found expression among many — but not all — campus blacks, bewildered and even dismayed some white students. When a *Boston Globe* reporter asked about tensions between Jewish and black students, he was told that the former were disappointed that "despite all their liberal upbringing, they haven't been able to relate to the blacks here. They're enormously upset to find that the blacks don't like them and don't need them." The mutual lack of understanding sometimes resulted in minor blow-ups. When a Jewish girl placed a sign on her dorm room door that exclaimed "Jewish Power!" her black next door neighbor responded by placing a sign on her door that read "White Pig." The first girl was dumbfounded. "I don't know why. I don't understand it. It was a joke," she insisted.¹¹⁰

The recognition that the categories of black and Jewish need not be mutually exclusive was exemplified by the case of Randall Bailey, the student who became the black protesters' chief interlocutor with the administration. A Brandeis senior of mixed racial heritage who was raised Jewish, Bailey went to Hebrew school as a child and was active

108. "Student Protests 1969–1970: Brandeis and America," April 12, 2000; Kenneth Sweder, interview with the author, May 6, 2010.

109. Nina McCain, "Student Views: Whites," *Boston Globe*, January 11, 1969, 5; Eric Yoffie, interview with the author, May 27, 2010.

110. Crocker Snow, Jr., "It's an Unreal Feeling on Brandeis Campus," *Boston Globe*, January 12, 1969, p. 2; Kenneth Gross, "Blacks on Campus: Angry and Alone Together," *The Nation*, February 17, 1969, p. 207.

in his synagogue youth group. Ironically, once at the heavily Jewish university he began to explore his African American heritage in greater depth and increasingly identified with the black student struggle. But he also retained a fondness for the Hebrew language and an interest in Jewish text study. Bailey had a more immersive Jewish upbringing than Abram, who never learned Hebrew. Bailey realized this and relished writing Hebrew notes to himself during negotiation meetings so that Abram would not be able to read them.¹¹¹

Despite Abram's public efforts to dismiss the university's Jewish character as a relevant factor in the unfolding drama, media outlets seemed eager to explore this angle. According to the *Nation* magazine's correspondent, Kenneth Gross, some members of the press corps could barely contain their contempt for the "long-haired" leftist supporters of the black protesters.¹¹² Local newspapers like the *Waltham News-Tribune*, which had a largely working class, white readership, portrayed the black protesters as wild-eyed revolutionaries and the mostly Jewish sympathizers as naive and tiresome children of privilege. "Blacks Eat – Whites on Hunger Strike," mocked one headline. The article quoted one of the twenty-two hunger strikers as suggesting that there was bound "to be some pressure [on the University] when word gets out that a few Jewish boys and girls are starving themselves."¹¹³ Gross himself reinforced this narrative in a *New York Post* article when he described the white sit-in outside of the president's office: "Boys with beards or moustaches wearing buttons supporting Biafra, shared space on expensive fur coats that some of the girls had draped on the cold marble floor."¹¹⁴

As official negotiations between the administration and the students dragged on, the faculty was reduced to near irrelevancy.¹¹⁵ They still controlled the academic program and its assent was needed in order to create a new department or major. In truth, however, the majority of the faculty fell in line behind the president and granted him maximal flexibility in his negotiations with the protesters. Despite some misgivings, the faculty

111. Jacob Cohen, interview with the author, November 5, 2009; "Student Protests 1969–1970: Brandeis and America," April 12, 2000. Bailey eventually received a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible at Emory University and is currently the Andrew Mellon Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible professor of Bible at the Interdenominational Theological Center, in Atlanta.

112. Gross, "Blacks on Campus," *The Nation*, p. 208.

113. Thomas Neville, "Blacks Eat — Whites on Hunger Strike," *Waltham News-Tribune*, January 15, 1969, pp. 1, 10.

114. Kenneth Gross, "Brandeis Won't Call in Police" *New York Post*, January 13, 1969.

115. Samuel Jay Keyser, *Mens Et Mania: The MIT Nobody Knows* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 26–28, 158.

voted in the midst of the crisis, on January 13, to establish a full-fledged department of African and Afro-American Studies, contingent upon the protesters vacating Ford Hall. And while they insisted that prerogatives related to faculty appointments remain within the faculty's purview, this coincided with Abram's own position and gave the president the cover he needed to stand firm in negotiations.¹¹⁶

While both the president and the protesters proclaimed their determination not to give in to the other side's unilateral demands, Abram's ultimatums were a negotiation tactic while the protesters genuinely viewed their ten demands as the "minimum essential."¹¹⁷ Once Abram realized that he would need to take the threat of force off of the table in order to keep the faculty and student council in his corner, he obtained a civil restraining order from the Middlesex County Superior Court ordering the trespassers to vacate Ford Hall and to cease disrupting the university's routine functioning. This allowed him to wage carrot and stick diplomacy, promising the protesters amnesty if they left the building and threatening them with being held in contempt of court and subject to both court punishment and university sanctions if they remained.¹¹⁸

Tensions mounted when black leaders from the Roxbury neighborhood in Boston arrived on campus in a show of solidarity with the protesters. Their influence was hyped in the local press but downplayed by the black students. Aikens, for example, recalled that while the support from the local black community was psychologically important, when the protesters sought counsel, they turned to black students on other Boston area university campuses. Nevertheless, some community members accompanied the discussion committee to its meetings with the administration's negotiating team, an act that profoundly rattled Abram who feared that the Roxbury leaders would seek to foment black-Jewish tensions.¹¹⁹

Abram later lamented that he hadn't banned outsiders. He believed that the ominous looking delegation had the desired effect of alarming the faculty. The incident made a deep and longstanding impression on him: "It was the first time I had personally seen blacks on the inflicting

116. *Ibid.*, 26–28; "Student Protests 1969–1970: Brandeis and America," April 12, 2000; Abram, "Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President's Chair," 114.

117. D.W. Light, Jr., and David Feldman, "Black and White at Brandeis," *North American Review* (Summer, 1969), 28.

118. Abram, "Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen From the President's Chair," 114.

119. Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 186; Alexander Aikens, interview with the author, September 21, 2010.

rather than receiving end of violence. I couldn't believe that this rabble in front of me could share a common goal with the Kings, Randolphs, Jordans, and Rustins with whom I'd worked so many years."¹²⁰ Despite his sense of violence at the hands of the student protesters, there were no physical altercations between black community leaders and university officials during the course of the occupation.

"Academia did not Suit Him"

As Abram hoped, his containment tactics denied the protesters much of their initial leverage. Sensing that they had little more to gain from the continued occupation, the black students exited the building on Saturday afternoon January 18, eleven days after the initial takeover. Relative calm returned to campus but the wounds were slow to heal. Although it survived repeated shutdown attempts, TYP became the favorite administration and faculty scapegoat in the wake of the occupation, while the white professors who were most associated with and committed to it felt demoralized and distrusted by virtually all sides.¹²¹

On a more fundamental level, the black student revolt at Brandeis, along with similar actions on other campuses, ushered in a new dynamic between traditionally white universities and their black students. Physics Professor Robert V. Lange was undoubtedly correct when he declared that "the idea that the university can have black students on the university's terms is finished." However, there was little evidence that the occupation or its aftermath did much to improve communication between blacks and whites on the Brandeis campus. On the contrary, some observers witnessed an upsurge of racist language and attitudes emanating from all sides. The black students emerged from Ford Hall ambivalent and disappointed. In the following weeks and months, despite moderating their demands they felt that Abram and the administration repeatedly acted in bad faith. They in turn responded by withdrawing from campus committees and boycotting the black studies courses taught by instructors who were perceived to be too cozy with the established power elite. Black students increasingly looked off campus to meet their social, cultural and spiritual needs. They flocked to Northeastern University's Afro-American Institute, located in Roxbury's John Eliot Square, for cultural programs and black studies classes. If Abram continued to insist that it was not the

120. *Ibid.*, 187; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 952.

121. Bryce Nelson, "Brandeis: How a Liberal University Reacts to a Black Takeover," *Science*, March 28, 1969, pp. 1433-1434; D. W. Light, Jr. and David Feldman, "Black and White at Brandeis," *North American Review*, Summer 1969, p. 29

role of the university to heal the wounds inflicted by society on African-Americans, the students viewed this as an abdication of responsibility. As one Afro leader put it: "If it is not the job of the university to heal the wound, it should at least be able to soothe the pain."¹²²

As for Abram, who by most accounts had earned bragging rights for diffusing the crisis without resort to violence or sacrificing academic freedom, the experience left him disillusioned and resentful. To be sure, he readily took a victory lap in the pages of the *New York Times Magazine*. The Brandeis president was granted a six page spread in the February 16, 1969 issue to give a first-hand account of his triumph. "The Eleven Days at Brandeis — As Seen from the President's Chair," burnished his image as an exemplar among a "new breed" of university presidents, while providing him a platform to dispense advice and wax philosophically about the future of the American university. But the article also contributed to the undoing of his presidency. His decision to use it as a self promotion vehicle infuriated the student body. One of his closest advisors during this period, David Squire, whom Abram appointed vice president of student affairs in early 1969, readily conceded that while the article might have been a public relations coup, it did irreparable damage to his relationship with the students. "What he really did was gloat about his victory. He pushed it in the students' faces. That turned the whole campus against him."¹²³

Abram's growing remorse about granting amnesty to the protesters ultimately caused him to take actions that further disillusioned both students and faculty. The decision to withhold punishment, including court proceedings and expulsion, bowed to the overwhelming sentiment on campus and won the endorsement of colleagues and jurists, including former Solicitor General and future Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox. But Abram viewed it as a betrayal of his own principles. "The schism between the university and the mind of a lawyer was now at its widest," he wrote in his memoir.¹²⁴

When on March 6, 1969, sixty-seven radicals, including many of the Ford Hall protesters and their white supporters, staged a sit-in in

122. Nelson, "Brandeis: How a Liberal University Reacts to a Black Takeover," *Science*, pp. 1433–1434; "Student Protests 1969–1970: Brandeis and America," April 12, 2000, Brandeis University; James Alexander, "Racial Strains Deepen on Brandeis Campus," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 15, 1969, p. 4.

123. Morris Abram, "The Eleven Days at Brandeis," 28–29, 113–116; David Squire, interview with the author, May 6, 2010.

124. Abram, *The Day is Short*, 189; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 949–950, 958.

the lobby outside of Abram's office to protest what they claimed was the sluggish implementation of the Ford Hall demands, an anguished Abram seized the opportunity to mete out justice. When the protesters refused to vacate the administration building at closing time, Abram declared them to be trespassers and announced that they would be subject to disciplinary action. Abram summarily established a campus judiciary committee to hear cases of student misconduct and disruption to university operations. Comprised of the present and former deans of faculty, with the dean of students participating *ex officio*, it was hardly a representative body. Just a few months earlier, Abram had criticized Sachar's "paternalistic" approach to campus management. In a startling turnaround, Abram dismissively brushed aside the proposition that universities should be guided by the principles of participatory democracy in matters of governance. Fleshing out his thinking in an address at the annual meeting of College Entrance Examination Board, Abram insisted that "adolescents" were "subject to the widest swing of emotions" and could not be relied upon to make decisions that were consistent with the educational purposes of a university. He also rejected the "distorted notion that the university is a sanctuary," and implicitly questioned his decision to avoid the use of force during the takeover as "morally wrong and legally indefensible."¹²⁵

The general student reaction was indignation. The student council voted to condemn the creation of the judiciary committee and declared that it would not recognize its legitimacy unless it was reconstituted to include student representation. It pointed out to the administration that the committee violated American Association of University Professors and American Council of Education guidelines, which called for student participation in university governance. More protests followed, including a sit-in by the student council. Ultimately, Abram was forced to relent and accept a committee with student representation. The reconstituted judiciary committee, which was headed by Heller School Dean Charles Schottland, decided to let the students go with a warning. Abram felt double-crossed. "If they'd all had their spanking they'd have been scared to death," he insisted. He felt assured that he would have overwhelming support from parents who did not want their children "to be mixed up with these black students' causes anyway."¹²⁶

125. Ken Sackman, Arnie Carter and Mike Eig, "Council, '76' Sit-In," *Brandeis Observer*, March 11, 1969; "Theory of Campus as Haven Decried," *New York Times*, October 28, 1969, 18; Abram Sachar, unsent letter to Morris Abram, March 12, 1970, Box 1, Abram Sachar Chancellor Papers, Brandeis University.

126. Sackman, Carter and Eig, "Council, '76' Sit-In,"; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 23, 1976, 956-958.

Problems Among Brandeis Colleagues

The uproar over the judiciary committee and the reconstituted committee's slap on the wrist to protesters were signs that Abram was overreaching. But it did little to encourage him to adopt a more consensus building approach to campus administration. On the contrary, he proceeded to alienate another group of stakeholders, the faculty. Despite his lack of a Ph.D., Abram had strong feelings about academic matters that tended to be reinforced by the university's precarious finances. In general, he felt that university faculties were pampered. A defender of a core curriculum, he bemoaned the proliferation in college catalogs of highly specialized courses that were more properly suited for graduate seminars, which he blamed on cronyism. He also believed that a small liberal arts university like Brandeis should focus on the basics rather than arcana. He tried to undercut the departments by creating interdisciplinary "university professorships." Finally, he took aim at the tenure process, specifically the tendency of academic departments to value research and publications over good teaching.¹²⁷

None of his positions were popular among a faculty invested in safeguarding its prerogatives. But Abram's style rather than the substance of his proposals ultimately alienated his interlocutors. Abram was an impatient man, and his attitude about the academic process, which he found protracted and labyrinthine, was not far removed from that of the Ford Hall protesters. Abram alienated the faculty by "preaching" to them rather than engaging in dialogue, former Vice President David Squire recalled. Sweder agreed that "academia did not suit him. It was too slow and ritualized and something he didn't take to." As relations soured, the faculty began calling for the appointment of a provost.¹²⁸

A similar dynamic played out in Abram's relationship to his administrative team. While his complaints about office intrigue and backbiting were probably valid and his concerns about a top-heavy administrative structure understandable in light of the school's financial problems, Abram's decision in Fall 1969 to hire an outside firm to recommend an administrative restructuring plan left his colleagues on edge and predictably provoked pushback even before the report was presented. Abram complained privately that his team, save for Squire, was "faithless," incompetent and even "sodomasochistic." But his sense of superiority impeded his ability to win over their confidence.¹²⁹

127. Abram, *The Day is Short*, 178–180; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 921–928; February 27, 1976, 976–977.

128. David Squire, interview with the author, May 6, 2010; Kenneth Sweder, interview with the author, May 6, 2010.

129. Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, January 27, 1976, 935; February 27, 1976, 993–995, 997; Abram, *The Day is Short*, 193.

The final straw came in December 1969, when Abram announced that Brandeis would open a law school. By that time, Abram had thoroughly alienated most of the faculty and students. With the law school controversy he lost the support of the board of trustees. The plan itself, which envisioned utilizing “the study of law as an instrument of social analysis and government policy-making” was controversial but, arguably, inspired. A school of law training future government policy makers and non-profit program managers and executives would have been a fitting complement to the well-regarded Heller School of Social Policy and Management. Abram also already had a commitment for a \$2.75 million donation towards a building. On the other hand, the prospect of opening a new school when the university was in retrenchment mode, beset by staffing cuts and a hiring freeze, struck many as dubious and even reckless. Even Abram’s assistant Sweder, who was tasked with drafting a feasibility memorandum, considered it far-fetched. The cost of stocking a top notch law library alone would run into the millions of dollars, he warned. But the relative merit and financial viability of the proposal was all but lost in the storm that ensued over its rollout. Abram failed to consult with the trustees, faculty, or his administrative team before making the announcement. Even his close friend Squire only learned about the proposed law school from reading the *New York Times*. The annual Palm Beach trustees meeting, which doubled as an important fundraiser, was only weeks away. “He was in deep trouble with the board. They wanted his head,” recalled Squire.¹³⁰

Brandeis Chancellor Sachar, who remained close to many of the trustees, worked behind the scenes in Palm Beach to stoke their ire. But in truth they needed little convincing. Earl Warren Professor of Constitutional Law Leonard Levy, who served as one of four faculty representatives to the board of trustees, spoke for many on both the faculty and the board when he told the campus newspaper that, “I was first astonished by the news and then so furious that my opinions at the time would have been unprintable.” He emphasized that the trustees as a group had never even discussed the possibility of opening a law school prior to Abram’s announcement, let alone given him their blessing. Levy, who supported “strong executive leadership” during the Ford Hall takeover,

130. Robert Reinhold, “Law School at Brandeis to Train Policy Makers,” *New York Times*, December 22, 1969, p. 18; Robert Guttman, “Abram Plans Law School; Several Faculty Opposed,” January 13, 1970, pp. 1, 4; Morris Abram, “Educating the Lawyer as Policy-Maker,” James Boyd White (ed.), *The Legal Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 938–942; Ken Sweder, interview with the author, September 3, 2013; David Squire, interview with the author, May 10, 2010; Abram, *The Day is Short*, 192; Brandeis University Faculty Senate Minutes, January 8, 1970, box 83, Morris Abram Papers, Emory University.

now excoriated Abram for “engaging in a unilateral preemptive strike that carries executive leadership to the abyss of Nicholas Miraculous Butlerism,” a reference to the imperious long-serving president of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler, who was known for his fascist sympathies. Even reliable supporters of the president, like politics and history professor John S. Roche, publically questioned the feasibility of Abram’s plan. The faculty senate for its part rebuked Abram, not only by questioning the law school as an academic priority, but also by requesting that he “refrain from announcing new schools and new projects,” until “overall plans for the direction of university growth have been made through the appropriate instrumentalities.” The law school controversy exemplified Abram’s “fatal flaws” as president. Politically tone deaf and dismissive of process, he was guided by impulse and a penchant for self-promotion. In Sweder’s words, he “had little feel for the protocols of the academy.”¹³¹

As the furor over the proposed law school reached a crescendo, Abram was approached by former Democratic presidential candidate and Brandeis trustee Hubert Humphrey about the possibility of jumping into the Senate race in New York. His likely Republican opponent would be Charles Goodell, who was appointed to the seat by Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller after the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. Goodell was a far less formidable opponent than Senior Senator Jacob Javits. His opposition to the Vietnam War and moderate voting record resulted in tepid support within the state Republican party. Abram was initially concerned about raising enough money to fund a successful candidacy — a consideration that would ultimately sink his campaign — but he was inclined to jump at the opportunity.¹³²

If his political aspirations and the relative weakness of the Republican candidate were pull factors, he was also feeling pushed by his increasingly frustrating experience at Brandeis. “I did not wish to be a mere administrative time server,” he recalled, reflecting on his impotence. “I wanted to add dimensions to the university.” The one area where he was clearly making a difference and in which he demonstrated uncommon acumen was fundraising. Sadly, that aspect of the job gave him little satisfaction.¹³³

131. David Squire, interview with the author, September 4, 2013; Leonard Levy, Letter to the Editor, *The Justice*, January 13, 1970, p. 2; Robert Guttman, “Abram Plans Law School,” 4; Ken Sweder, interview with the author, September 3, 2013. The moniker Nicholas Miraculous was coined by Theodore Roosevelt.

132. Abram, *The Time is Short*, 193; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 27, 1976, 993–1002.

133. Abram, *The Time is Short*, 192–193; David Squire, interview with the author, May 10, 2010; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 27, 1976, 991–992.

Abram flew down to Miami to speak with Wien, who encouraged Abram to stay but was unwilling to keep him at all costs. For example, he dismissed the proposition that Abram be granted a leave of absence to pursue the Senate seat. And he similarly balked when Abram made his remaining contingent on his ability to fire his executive vice president, Clarence Q. Berger, a longtime Brandeis administrator, whom Abram accused of “courting the shelter of Sachar” and systematically working to undermine his administration.

Abram officially resigned on February 23, 1970, only seventeen months after his inauguration. He withdrew from the Senate race barely six weeks later, claiming that Arthur Goldberg’s late entry into the New York State governor’s race adversely affected his ability to raise the \$1 million needed to finance his primary bid.¹³⁴

The law school fiasco and conflicts with his administrative staff played a significant role in Abram’s decision to walk away from the presidency, but it was student unrest that defined his tenure and was seldom far from his mind. Indeed it was the subject of his valedictory address to the trustees in Florida. “The generational gap is resulting in two nations,” he warned, adopting rhetoric reminiscent of the 1968 Kerner Commission on race relations and civil disorders. Parents and children may share similar ideals, he argued, but they were divided over tactics and a sense of the possible. “Man is improvable but not perfectible. No society will ever be perfectible. And revolution is not possible in this country.”¹³⁵

Abram took the white middle and upper middle class student as his paradigm, thereby implicitly suggesting that only those who fit this demographic were part of the university’s core constituency. He challenged his audience to assume some responsibility for the generation gap: “You must bear in mind that college faculties and administrators did not sire these children. They came from your homes, raised in your families, and your communities, under laws that either you established, or permitted to stand. And let me be candid with you. I have seen too many mothers come rushing up to me with great pride to tell me about ‘my son, the activist.’” It was an accusatory cry of frustration in an otherwise measured analysis. His failure, he seemed to be saying, was inextricable from a larger societal breakdown.¹³⁶

Weeks later, as he announced his departure from Brandeis at a press conference in his Weston, MA, home, between fifty and seventy student

134. Abram, *The Time is Short*, 193–194; Morris Abram interview with Eli N. Evans, February 27, 1976, 993–1002.

135. Morris Abram, “Miami Trustee Meeting Address,” January 1970, box 83, Morris Abram Papers, Emory University.

136. *Ibid.*

protesters congregated outside, some donning war paint and carrying a Confederate flag. Seemingly there to remind him about why he was eager to leave, they shouted slogans like “Go Back to Georgia,” and “The Door is Always Open.” The latter slogan was a reference to Abram’s frequent insistence that he was always prepared to meet with students. Abram’s door remained closed until the press conference’s completion.¹³⁷

At that press conference, Abram insisted that his Senate bid did not signal an abandonment of education and the problems of youth as issues of deep concern, but rather a conviction that he could more effectively affect change as a senator. When he finally emerged from his home he tried to put on a conciliatory face, sensing, perhaps, that an angry confrontation with the students would be an unwelcome distraction for his embryonic campaign. “I would rather have you all then a whole regiment of Spiro Agnews,” he told the protesters.¹³⁸ His comment succeeded in breaking much of the tension, and the crowd dispersed shortly thereafter. But it did nothing to alleviate the underlying friction. Only a week earlier, 87% of the student body signaled its frustration with the lack of student involvement in University decision making on matters ranging from the proposed law school and administrative restructuring to tuition rates and class sizes by submitting their course registration cards to the student council rather than the registrar. David Squire joked that the students came to Abram’s house because “they wanted to make sure he was really leaving.” But as Abram drove off to catch a plane for New York, he must have felt content knowing that the student troublemakers would now be somebody else’s headache.¹³⁹ Two days after taking office, Abram’s successor, Charles Irwin Schottland, signed an agreement with Afro to increase the university’s minority enrollment by eighty students.¹⁴⁰

137. Richard Galant, “Abram Officially Resigns Post; Will Enter U.S. Senate Race; Conflict Develops Over Appointment of Acting President,” *The Justice*, February 24, 1970, pp. 1, 3, 5; Nina McCain, “Abram Resigns . . . Eyes Senate,” *Boston Evening Globe*, February 23, 1970, pp. 1, 3; Andrew Blake, “Abram’s Departure Draws Student Fire,” *Boston Globe*, February 24, 1970; James Fenton, “Abram Leaves Brandeis; Will Enter Senate Race,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1970, p. 32.

138. Agnew, served as Nixon’s Vice President from 1969 to 1973, when he resigned in the midst of a financial scandal. Agnew styled himself as a champion of the so-called “silent majority” of Americans. His scathing critiques of antiwar protesters and student activists won him their scorn.

139. Nina McCain, “Abram Resigns . . . Eyes Senate,” *Boston Evening Globe*, February 23, 1970, pp. 1, 3; James Fenton, “Abram Leaves Brandeis; Will Enter Senate Race,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1970, p. 32; Andrew Blake, “Abram’s Departure Draws Student Fire,” *Boston Globe*, February 24, 1970; David Squire, interview with the author, May 10, 2010.

140. <http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/exhibits/ford/occupation/index.html>. Accessed on May 29, 2014.

After his resignation from Brandeis and his aborted Senate run, Abram returned to a career in the law, punctuated by stints of government and other forms of public service. During the 1970s he served for nine years as chairman of the United Negro College Fund, and led the Moreland Act Commission, which probed corruption in New York's nursing home industry. Also during that period he began to question his lifelong association with the Democratic party, and made a symbolic break in the 1980 presidential election by publically announcing his support for Ronald Reagan. He subsequently became a political appointee in both the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, serving as vice-chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights and United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. He also remained active in Jewish life, taking a turn as chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and head of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. From 1993 until his death in 2000 he headed UN Watch, which was created by Edgar Bronfman and the World Jewish Congress to monitor the United Nation's activities vis-à-vis antisemitism and Israel.¹⁴¹

Abram and Ford Hall in Retrospect

Roughly five months after Abram left Brandeis, the *New York Times* ran an article entitled "Liberal College Presidents Having a Tough Time." Occasioned by the resignation of Stanford University President Kenneth Pitzer, the story was painfully familiar: a distinguished liberal assumes a university presidency in 1968 with the expressed hope of healing the divisions between his campus community and society at large, only to admit defeat less than two years later. Abram was cited among a roster of previous casualties, most of whom were vocal supporters of academic freedom and opponents of the Vietnam War. After his experience at Brandeis, Abram would have ruefully agreed with the article that the best hope for universities moving forward was "politically and academically liberal presidents who are determined to use the legitimate power of the law and of their office to maintain order and to protect academic freedom against coercion from the left on-campus, and the right off campus."¹⁴²

141. William Honan, "Morris Abram is Dead at 81"; Elaine Woo, "Morris B. Abram; Jewish Leader was Longtime Human Rights Advocate," *Los Angeles Times* (March 17, 2000).

142. Fred Hechinger, "Liberal College Presidents Having a Tough Time," *New York Times*, July 5, 1970, 95.

The train wreck of a presidency from which Abram fled in February 1970 was given a dignified postmortem by Richard Freeland. By Abram's own account, he set out to govern the university as a "Renaissance prince" and became disillusioned when it became clear that he would need to be a "keeper of the peace, not through reason or persuasion, but by buying off the troublemakers." His downfall, as Freeland pointed out, was his failure to perceive a third way. "Abram saw with accuracy places where Brandeis needed attention, but he was too much an outsider to academia and too unready to learn its ways to find constructive means to address them. He saw the excesses of the period astutely but conveyed little sense of deeper, more positive, redemptive impulses in his community, or in the scholarly profession more broadly, that could provide a basis for progress."¹⁴³

Abram's nemesis, Abe Sachar, sized up the situation in a more colorful and self-aggrandizing manner, but agreed with Freeland on most of the essentials: In an unsent letter to Abram, Sachar contended that Abram was handicapped by his overly romantic view of the university and the job of the president. Consequently, he quickly became jaded by the seemingly unlimited time spent on "philanthropic courtship and ingratiating," and tired of a "highly volatile faculty," and irrational students whose demands "you know in your heart are wrong." Abram's choices in the face of such abuse were equally unpalatable: "either getting ulcers or beating your wife. . . . I had other alternatives because I was a *first*. The second president cannot fall back on the drama of 'pioneering.'"¹⁴⁴

One should take care to differentiate the long term impact of the takeover on the remainder of Abram's tenure at Brandeis and his general outlook and political orientation, from his real time response during the eleven day occupation. Abram generally earned high marks from Brandeis' supporters and the general public for his handling of the occupation. The crisis was defused without resort to violence and with the Brandeis community remaining fairly intact. The Abram administration neither capitulated to the most extreme demands of the protesters, which would have compromised the academic integrity of the institution, nor did it irretrievably poison student-administration relations by meting out severe punishments. Abram's actions were governed by a combination of lawyerly instinct and public relations concerns. He was also blessed with a generally compliant faculty and a relatively cautious student body. Finally, he was able to learn from the experiences of administrators at

¹⁴³. Robert M. Freeland, *Academia's Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts, 1945-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 232; Abram, *The Day is Short*, 194.

¹⁴⁴. Abram Sachar, unsent letter to Morris Abram, March 12, 1970.

schools, like Columbia University, that had previously experienced student unrest. While none of this is meant to obscure the inevitable clash between his Cold War liberalism and the New Left radicalism and anti-establishmentarianism of the student activists, or downplay the impact of his character and temperament on his ability to negotiate university politics and human relationships, it contributes an air of tragedy to Abram's brief tenure.

Abram's office placed him on the front lines in the conflict over black and student empowerment. But the issues that he was forced to confront presaged a more general American Jewish reckoning with the erosion of the black-Jewish political alliance. Abram's odyssey from civil rights attorney to neo-conservative Reagan administration official represented a dramatic if arguably extreme version of a widespread but not pervasive American Jewish political metamorphosis.¹⁴⁵

In one sense, Abram was the Jewish everyman: Despite the radicalization of the civil rights movement, he entered Brandeis with a strong reluctance to abandon the integrationist strategies that traditionally united Jews and blacks, but emerged as a strong opponent of affirmative action with a decidedly ambivalent view of the efficacy of a black-Jewish political partnership. His experience at Brandeis played a key role in shaping his later political views, particularly his opposition to affirmative action. "It was Brandeis that would resonate in me when the *Bakke* case arose at the University of California a decade later," he acknowledged, referring to the landmark Supreme Court case circumscribing the use of racial quotas in university admissions.¹⁴⁶

Throughout the remainder of his life Abram vociferously insisted that his commitment to liberalism remained intact. "It irks me that many who called me liberal in Georgia . . . now say that I have changed my colors," he complained, in 1980. "Some charge that this is related to my ties to a Jewish community that has strayed from its liberal moorings. I have not changed my views on human equality or freedom one whit," he wrote. "I resent the concerted effort to steal the liberal standard from positions like mine and to plant it on the opposite ideological ground."

145. While most Jews did not become neo-conservative and remained aligned with the Democratic Party, their views on domestic and foreign policy issues drifted toward the political center in the 1970s and 1980s with the exception of issues related to personal freedom, church-state separation, and sexual morality. See Irving Louis Horowitz, "The Politics of Centrist: Jews and the 1980 Elections," in Daniel Elazar (ed.), *The New Jewish Politics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 13–26 and Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, "The American Jews, the 1984 Elections, and Beyond," in Elazar (ed.), *The New Jewish Politics*, 33–50.

146. Abram, *The Day is Short*, 194–195.

In his memoir, he added: "Liberalism for me means that, while men differ in their natural endowments, they must be treated as equal citizens in the eyes of the law; that they should possess equality of opportunity and be afforded some minimum of social benefits. These principles, which united American liberals for generations, now divide me from some who seek equality of result and who sanction the preferences imposed by government to attain it." While Abram's falling out with the Democratic party stemmed in part from his disillusionment with Carter administration policies on a host of domestic and foreign policy issues, as the latter quotation suggests, it was the issue of affirmative action or racial preferences that most exercised Abram.¹⁴⁷

Realistically, Brandeis' modest efforts to increase minority enrollment, including TYP and targeted scholarships, likely had a marginal affect at best on Jewish enrollment. (Historically, the most active form of affirmative action at Brandeis involved efforts to balance the male-female ratio in its entering classes.) Yet given the recent Jewish experience with discriminatory admissions quotas, it is unsurprising that the Ford Hall protesters' demands around recruitment and enrollment elicited an emotional reaction, both from Abram and within the Jewish community, that underscored a divergence of black and Jewish interests. As Marc Dollinger pointed out, "The idea of imposing collectivist definitions of need scared a Jewish community whose liberal philosophy always stressed individual rights and meritocratic advance."¹⁴⁸

The significance of Morris Abram's Brandeis years transcends the story of a failed presidency. It provides a vivid case study of the crisis of Jewish liberalism in the late-1960s.

147. Morris Abram, "Liberalism & the Jews: A Symposium," 15; William Honan, "Morris Abram is Dead at 81"; Morris Abram, *The Day is Short*, 265.

148. Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 205.