

## When African-American Students Took Control: Remembering Ford & Sydeman Halls at Brandeis University in 1969



On Jan. 8, 1969, approximately 70 African-American students took control of Ford and Sydeman Halls. The students quickly presented the administration with a list of 10 demands for better minority representation on campus. Although the administration did not come to an agreement on all 10 demands, the students left Ford and Sydeman halls on Jan. 18, 11 days after the occupation began. The administration did grant most of the students amnesty and President Morris Abram stated that every legitimate demand would be met in good faith

*Justice* the main student newspaper articles from 1968 through 1970 serve as the sources for this timeline. This is a basic outline of the events of the student occupation. If you would like to add details to this timeline please send an e-mail message to [ascdepartment@brandeis.edu](mailto:ascdepartment@brandeis.edu).

**April 4, 1968** Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated.

**April 1968** In response to the assassination of Dr. King, the Brandeis Afro-American Society makes a proposal for how the university should respond. The proposal includes the active recruitment of more Black professors and students and the development of an Afro-American studies department.

**April 1968** The administration establishes 10 Martin Luther King Scholarships.

**September 1968** First Transitional Year Program (TYP) class meets under the direction of Professor Jacob Cohen.

**October 6, 1968** Morris Abram is officially inaugurated as the second president of Brandeis University.

**December 11, 1968** The faculty approve the African and Afro-American Studies Concentration.

**December 18, 1968** A white first-year student allegedly shot a Black TYP student in the cheek with a BB gun. The administration would not expel the accused until after a formal trial. In the end, no student ever pressed charges.

**Tuesday, January 7, 1969** A member of the San Francisco State University community, Brandeis students Lloyd Daniels '69 and Sidney Blumenthal '69, and Brandeis Assistant Professor of Sociology Neil Friedman give presentations discussing the student strike at San Francisco State and how it related to Brandeis.

**Wednesday, January 8, 1969** Professor Neil Friedman announced that he was striking for one week in sympathy with San Francisco State and asked the University to suspend his salary for that time.

**Wednesday, January 8, 1969 2:00 PM** 60 to 75 students, members of the Brandeis Afro-American Society, take over Ford Hall. The takeover started in the switchboard room with 10 to 15 Black students telling the two operators to leave the building. After seizing the phone system, the students moved throughout Ford telling classes to vacate the building and instructing various personnel to leave. After the building was secured, students allowed members of the press to go to the office of Lathan Johnson, the Black student advisor, where the occupying students held a news conference. At the news conference, spokesmen Ricardo Millet '68, GRAD, Ridgewood Residence Counselor, and Roy DeBerry '70, Brandeis Afro-American Society President, read a prepared statement and a list of ten demands (an African Studies Department with the power to hire and fire. This means that the committee must have an independent budget of its own; year-round recruitment of Black students by Black students and headed by a Black director.

The number of students in the TYP Program should be doubled next year and the administration should support and actively campaign for the necessary funds/ there must be Black directors for the Upward Bound and TYP Program; immediate action on the part of the administration to have Black professors added to the various departments; the establishment of an Afro-American center designed by Black students; written clarification of the position of TYP students within the University structure encompassing the areas of financial aid, admission to Brandeis, criteria for satisfactory work; expulsion of a white student who shot a Black student before the Christmas holiday; the brochure (for Black student recruitment) must be accepted in its present form or only with changes accepted by Black students. The brochure must be published immediately; intensify the recruitment of African students in the Wien program; and ten Martin Luther King automatic full scholarships for on and off campus Black students. This should include transportation from the TYP Program on up to graduation from the University), which they said were non-negotiable. The spokesmen also called for a guarantee of complete amnesty for all those involved in the protest. At 5:00 that evening some of the occupying students held a meeting in Mailman Hall to announce the reasons for the takeover. Phyllis Raynor, a representative of the Afro-American Society, presented the group's demands to let the white students decide among themselves what kind of support they wished to offer. A *Justice* article states that the Black students realized they could not be successful on their own and did hope the white students would back them in some way. That evening the administration and faculty held emergency meetings. Dean of University Planning and Development Clarence Berger held a news conference in the Board of Trustees' office and read a statement from the President. The document condemned the action of the Black students and noted the fact that the demands were never formally presented in their present form to any administrator. The Faculty approved, by a vote of 153 to 18, a resolution condemning the Black students' actions and called for the students to leave the building and enter into negotiations. A faculty committee was appointed which entered Ford Hall to talk with the students.

**Thursday, January 9, 1969** 400 students meet in Gerstenzang Room 123 to codify their opinion. A petition drafted and approved by a large majority of the students opposed the use of police, the takeover of other buildings, and the use of force of any kind, and was in favor of keeping all channels of communication open. Some white students started a sit-in at the Bernstein-Marcus administration building in support of the Black students' position. Members of Afro-American Society rename Ford and Sydeman Halls Malcolm X University.

**Tuesday, January 14, 1969** Some students begin a general strike in support of the demands of the Black students are being held in contempt of a civil restraining order.

**Saturday, January 18, 1969** The occupation ends as 64 Students leave Ford Hall by the second-story rear fire escape without any substantive agreements concerning the ten demands. However, the administration does grant amnesty to the occupying students, with the exception of a few female members who remained in the building. President Abram states that every legitimate demand would be met in good faith.

**April 24, 1969** The faculty approves the African and Afro-American Department.

**April 30, 1969** Ronald Walters is announced as the Chair of the African and Afro-American Department.

**May 1969** The faculty meets to evaluate TYP and name a new director.

**After one year**, many students are still not completely satisfied because they feel that many issues surrounding the occupation remain unresolved.

**March 4, 1970** Charles Schottland, previously the Dean of the Florence Heller Graduate School, takes office as the Acting President of Brandeis University.

**March 6, 1970** President Schottland signs an agreement with the Afro-American Organization to bring 80 additional minority students to Brandeis.