

THE PEARLMAN TAKEOVER

an account of Third World solidarities and student organizing at Brandeis University in the 1970s



a digital zine by ellie tang kleiman

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The creation of this zine* arose out of my senior research project, "The Cultural is Political: Institutional Memory and Asian American/Pacific Islander Communities at Brandeis University", aiming to document and make accessible the histories of AAPI students. Like the histories of all people of color at Brandeis, such a story has been largely excluded from conventional tellings of the institution's past. While conducting archival research, I found that many of the earliest archival materials documenting AAPI students at Brandeis revolve around a particular incident of Third World student organizing in the 1970s: the Pearlman Takeover.

On April 29th 1975, Brandeis University students initiated the six-day takeover of Pearlman Hall, the building home to the Sociology Department on campus. This multi-racial group of students, who called themselves the "Student Action Group" or "SAG", presented a list of demands to the administration concerning the inclusion of Asian Americans in the minority financial aid pool, a proportional increase in that pool, an end to faculty layoffs, reversing cuts to the Transitional Year Program (TYP) budget, no worker firings to obtain money to meet the other demands, and total amnesty for those inside the building. This brief and long-forgotten incident in the university's history reveals much more than a week-long protest, but over three years of collective organizing, multi-racial solidarity, imaginative militancy, and the carving of a liberatory space by low-income students of color in an institution that was never meant for them.

My hope in recounting the Pearlman Takeover and the organizing that led up to it is that students and administration alike learn from and remember the repeated patterns of oppression in the university's history that have the potential to be challenged and overturned by student power.

ellie tang kleiman (she/they)

*I also published some of the content found in this zine as an article on the Brandeis Black Space Portal website under the same title.



THE THIRD WORLD COALITION

The Third World Coalition at Brandeis was composed of three groups: **BAASA** (Brandeis Asian American Students Association), **GRITO** (organization of Puerto Rican and Mexican American students), and **AFRO** (Afro-American Organization). Each group forged its own strong political identity, following in the footsteps of the Black students who occupied Ford Hall in 1969 as well as the emergence of national movements and groups such as the Third World Coalition, the Third World Women's Alliance, the Combahee River Collective, and the anti-war movement.

In the early 70s, BAASA led campus dissent against the war in Vietnam and American imperialism, organized Brandeis (specifically, Professor Fellman's Pearlman office) to be the headquarters of the 1970 National Student Strike, and participated in demonstrations and community work in Boston's Chinatown. Afro continued to hold the administration accountable to Ford Hall demands by pushing for changes in admission procedures and increased scholarships to Black students. Grito organized a strike of Kutz dining hall alongside the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee demanding that Brandeis only serve union-picked lettuce.



**Racism
In Our
Ranks?**

In February **1972**, students of BAASA, Grito, and Afro held a **DEMONSTRATION** protesting cuts in financial aid allocated to minorities. By December 1972, these three groups had formed the **THIRD WORLD COALITION (TWC)** and brought forth their unified demands to a

meeting with President Marver Hillel Bernstein. In the spring of 1973, it was revealed that the administration failed to meet the demands--instead of doubling the minority financial aid pool from \$100,000 to \$200,000 as the TWC had asked, they only increased the pool to \$110,000.

Administration also rejected the demand to include Asians in the minority financial aid pool, stating that "The Faculty Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid finally decided that the inclusion of Asian students would, in effect, force out other minority students because Asians generally have stronger academic records. The committee thought **ASIANS 'DO WELL ENOUGH' ON THEIR OWN** in applying to Brandeis"



**Grito Members Picket Kutz,
Spread Boycott of Lettuce**

Brandeis
Asian American
Student Assoc.

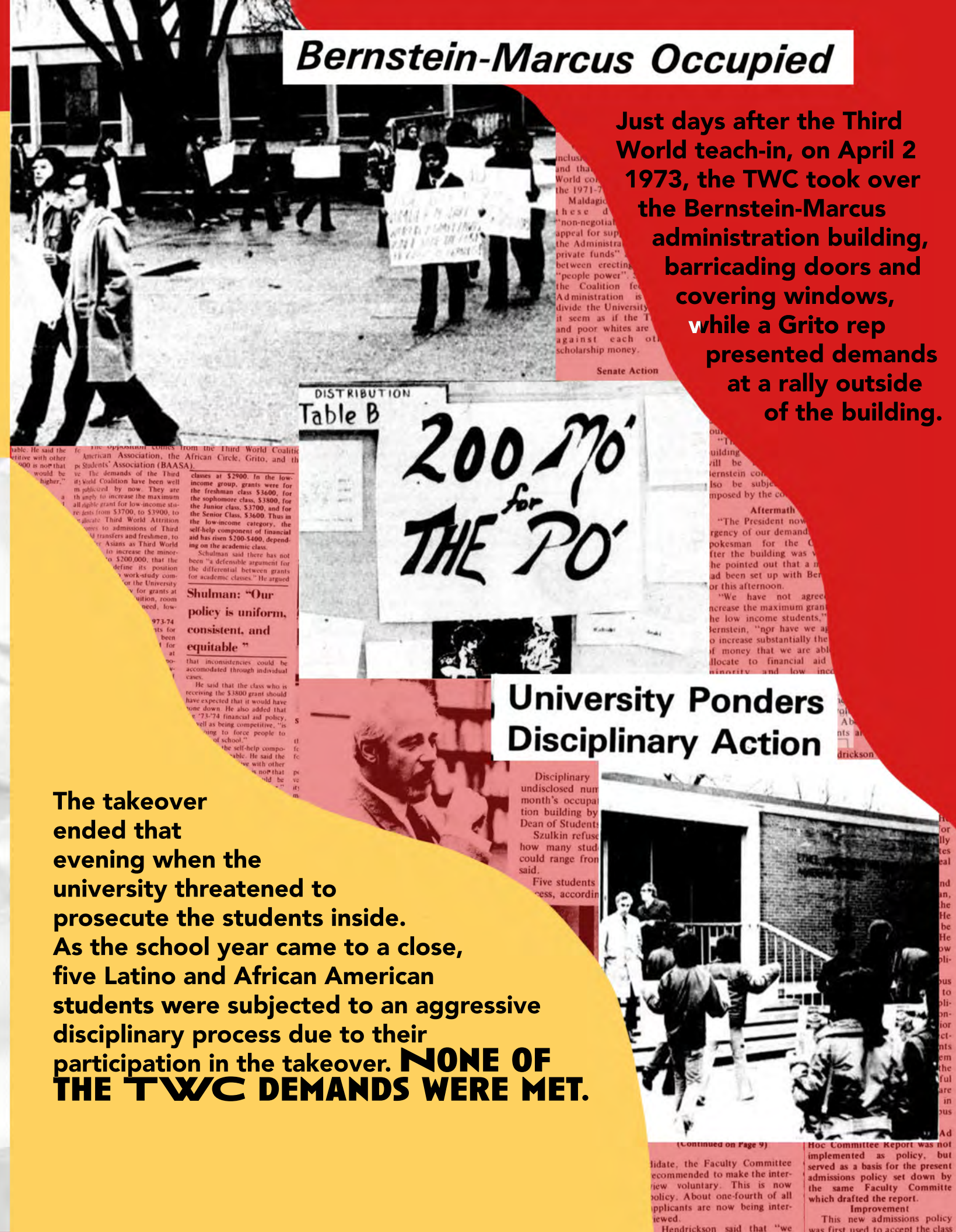
Fin. Aid Demands Made By Third World Students

The administration's response prompted the TWC, the following spring, to publicly release a list of demands and hold a **THIRD WORLD TEACH-IN** in late March. Their list of demands included:

- The financial aid grants for full need, low income students, should be raised from \$3700 to \$3900
- That TW attrition monies should go towards the admissions of TW transfers and freshmen
- That Asians be considered part of the TW students
- That the minority pool funds should be increased from \$110,000 to \$200,000 for the following reasons:
In order that Asians may be included in the minority aid pool
In order that the \$300 increase in tuition and room and board be compensated for in grant
- In order that the TW community be restored to the previous level of 1971-72
- That the University specifically define their position as regards Brandeis' commitment of \$400 in work, with the additional possibility of work-study equal to or above this year's allotment
- That, because of yearly ambiguity over financial aid and admission of TW students, the University hereby fix policy to establish low income grants at 87% of the total tuition, room and board, for full need students

Bernstein-Marcus Occupied

Just days after the Third World teach-in, on April 2 1973, the TWC took over the Bernstein-Marcus administration building, barricading doors and covering windows, while a Grito rep presented demands at a rally outside of the building.



The takeover ended that evening when the university threatened to prosecute the students inside. As the school year came to a close, five Latino and African American students were subjected to an aggressive disciplinary process due to their participation in the takeover. **NONE OF THE TWC DEMANDS WERE MET.**

THE CAMPUS STUDENT COALITION

Administration Recommends 50% Cutback in TYP Budget

By SCOTT SCHULMAN
The administration has recommended a more than 50 percent reduction in funding for the Transitional Year Program (TYP) for 1975-76.

A memorandum to the faculty from Dean of Faculty Jack Goldstein stated that "the budget for the TYP program will have to be substantially reduced from its present level of over \$80,000 to a



Clarence Hunter, Director of TYP.

figure less than half this amount." The memo, dated Feb. 24, was issued three days before the

faculty voted 84 to 5 to approve a motion making TYP a permanent part of the Brandeis curriculum. There was no mention of budgetary considerations in the motion.

Clarence Hunter, director of TYP at Brandeis, described the memo as a "bombshell" and indicated that he had asked for about \$80,000 for the 1975-76 budget. He explained that TYP "couldn't function" on a budget of \$35,000.

"We must maintain an educationally viable program which is financially sound," Hunter said, adding that "it is silly to continue a program just to have a program."

Suggestions outlined in the memo for cutting expenses include having the program enroll only commuter students from the Boston area, and having the director of the program assume additional responsibilities in the general area of "recruitment and services to educationally disadvantaged persons."

Hunter said that enrolling only commuter students will save the University \$18,000, and noted that "commuting students do as well as those on campus." He emphasized, however, that these students

"won't be incorporated into the campus atmosphere."

In response to the second suggestion for reducing expenditures, the administration would ask the director to fill an opening within the University where a vacancy exists. Thus the funds from the vacant office would become the director's salary.

After preliminary discussions with the dean of faculty, Hunter said they are "far from agreement on this point." He believes this proposal is not feasible since the director, in addition to his administrative duties, must also

(Continued on page 9)

Fundraising

Brandeis Raises \$2.5 Million

By NEIL PICKETT
President Marver Bernstein announced Friday that the University has raised about \$2.5 million in unrestricted income as of Feb. 28.

Bernstein expressed confidence

Two years later, in the spring of **1975**, the administration announced a cut to more than 50% of the Transitional Year Program (TYP) budget from \$80,000 to \$35,000.

←
IRONIC, RIGHT?

Coalition Marches on Bernstein-Marcus

The CSC kicked off a week of direct action on March 11, 1975, which consisted of marches, sit-ins, and letters to administration leading up to the Board of Trustees meeting at the end of the week.



Members of Student Coalition (Rick Johnson of Afro on left and Jaime Perez of Grito on right) schedule appointment with President Bernstein.



CSC Week of Protest Ends With Frustration

Yet, the week ended in "frustration" when the Board of Trustees announced it was unable to meet the CSC's demands, and resulted in an argument between the "moderates" and "activists" among the CSC, and some of the "activist" members split off from the group. Nevertheless, CSC efforts continued throughout April, with the publication of a weekly independent newsletter and a boycott of lunch at Kutz dining hall in support of CSC demands.

UNITE TO SUPPORT THE THREE JUST DEMANDS OF THE CSC!

Recent weeks have seen a mass movement being built here at Brandeis University by the Campus Student Coalition. The CSC has successfully mobilized hundreds of students around the just and democratic demands of: 1) full compensation for the \$650 increase in student fees, 2) opposition to academic cutbacks, and, 3) opposition to worker layoffs or firings within the university.



After two weeks of enthusiastically mobilizing students at mass meetings, marches, pickets and rallies, and attempting to talk with the university administration and trustees, the CSC was faced on March 13, by a blanket rejection of the students' demands by the small circle of people who run this university. As a result, feelings of pessimism and defeatism have made their entry into the student movement, putting a brake on the further development of the mass movement.

At this moment, a number of students came forward and organized the Progressive Students Caucus with the main aim of defeating pessimism and assisting in the building of the Student Coalition on the basis of a new, strong unity. The Caucus has taken upon itself at this stage the task of clarifying and summing up the struggle and building a new unity on the basis of that.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WE HAVE TO FIGHT PESSIMISM IN OUR RANKS! THE STRUGGLE IS NOT OVER, IT HAS BARELY BEGUN!

A Struggle For Democratic Rights

The general economic crisis has entered this university. To this, the University has responded by cutbacks which primarily hurt those groups that can least afford it. What are the trends in the university's cutback policies? They hit students, especially from working class backgrounds, both white and Third World; they hit working people, both campus workers and junior faculty. Cutbacks in academics show the same trends: e.g., we see severe cutbacks in TYP, a program that has served working class students; we see the role of the Afro American Studies Department being questioned. In total, students, workers and faculty are all being hit.

All of this reveals that the burden of the economic crisis is being shifted onto the backs of students and working people. This is what must be opposed, and this is, in fact, what the present struggle amounts to: A STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS to prevent the shifting of the burden onto our backs. The demands of the CSC are just, and all progressive and democratic people on campus should solidly stand by these just demands of the students.

Days later, representatives of Afro, BAASA, Grito, the United Farm Workers Support Committee, the Women's Coalition, and the Waltham Group formed a group called the **CAMPUS SUPPORT COALITION (CSC)**. The first

meeting was promptly held to establish demands, many of which were adopted or adapted from the TWC demands two years prior, and with some additions including the end to faculty layoffs and no worker firings to meet the demands.

THE PEARLMAN TAKEOVER

As the end of the 1974-75 school year approached, former CSC activists decided to take matters into their own hands. At the end of April, students formed the **STUDENT ACTION GROUP (SAG)**, endorsed by the TWC, and took what some members identified as **PURPOSEFULLY MILITANT AND DISRUPTIVE ACTION** to occupy Pearlman Hall. SAG intended the occupation to send a clear message to the university administration to take their demands seriously. On April 29th 1975 at 7:55am, a group of 28 anonymous students entered Pearlman Hall. The doors of the building were immediately secured with chairs and ropes.

WHY PEARLMAN?

Pearlman hall was chosen for a number of reasons: it was central to campus layout, it had symbolic significance as it was used as the National Student Strike Headquarters five years prior, and many of the student organizers were sociology majors therefore they knew both the building and its faculty very well. In fact, secret negotiations were made with sociology faculty prior to the takeover to ensure that they were fine with their offices being inaccessible for the week. Recently, Professor Gordon Fellman casually reminisced that his only ask of the students was that they water his plants while inside (which they did). Fellman and four other sociology faculty members served as liaisons between the administration and students during the takeover.



DAY 1

The first day of the sit-in was quite eventful: after the demands were announced on the campus radio (same demands as CSC with addition of amnesty for those inside the building), a group ranging in number from 50-175 students marched, chanted, and rallied outside the building expressing solidarity with those inside and with the protest activities occurring at Boston College, UMass, and Brown at the same time. The spokespeople and "faces" of the group represented BAASA, Grito, and Afro. The spokespeople made clear that students would not leave the building until demands were met, even in the face of the university's immediate threat to use force to dislodge students in seeking a court injunction. The National Lawyers Guild helped students take the university to court and file a Temporary Restraining Order, which was overturned within days, but allowed the students to stall the university and remain in the building for longer.

March to Building at 7:55 a.m.

Students Occupy Pearlman

March to Building at 7:55 a.m.

Throughout the six days of the takeover, while juggling legal hurdles and negotiations with the administration, SAG held rallies and teach-ins outside of Pearlman that drew large crowds. There were teach-ins about **MAY DAY** on May 1st and on **THE VIETNAM WAR** and US imperialism, given that the fall of Vietnam occurred on the first day of the takeover.



the Justice **EXTRA**
BRANDIS UNIVERSITY
MONDAY, MAY 5, 1975
VOLUME XXVII NUMBER 26A

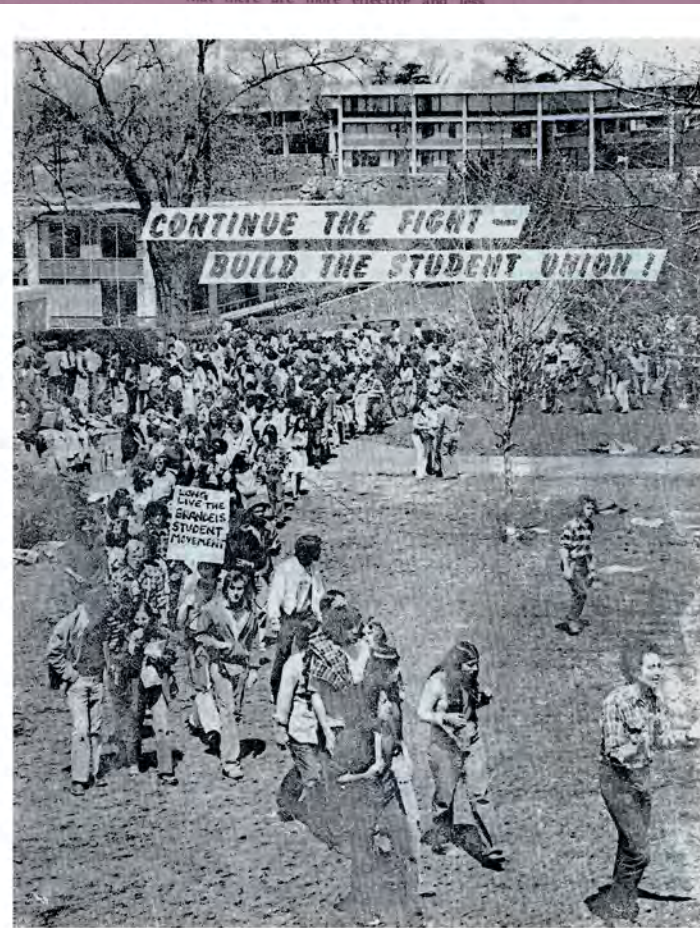
Takeover Ends

University Changes Position
TYP to Receive \$17,500 More

the TYP budget by \$27,000, set a "floor" on and intent to increase the grant proportion, indicated that they would not terminate any workers for supplemental funds, and committed to the employment of students to assist in the recruitment of low-income and minority students. They committed to "study and report on" the concern about financial aid for Asian Americans, but it wasn't until the following fall that Asians were officially recognized as a minority group eligible for minority financial aid. Despite President Bernstein's repeated claims that "no real concessions were made", there is no denying the university's **SHIFTED STANCES ON MANY FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES**. Immediately after these concessions (or "shifted stances") were confirmed, on May 5th 1975 at 12:10am, a group of 25 students entered the building and exited alongside the 28 occupying students to maintain the anonymity of the occupiers.

AFTERMATH

In the weeks following the end of the takeover, students gathered in an assembly of over 400 students and agreed on the establishment of the Student Union, with the purpose of being a "permanent defense organization" to defend students' rights, including the right of all people to an education, the right of students to organize, and the right to have a role in budgetary and other University decisions. Students also held a rally to demand that President Bernstein address the student body in a convocation, to clarify the agreements made after the Pearlman Takeover. A group of 55 students walked to his house and "received 5 police cars and a closed house as a response to the attempt at clarifying the issues". In a pamphlet found in the University Archives, the new Student Union rearticulated the need for students to continue to organize, work and struggle, and celebrated the students' victory:



"WE HAVE ACHIEVED THE MOST DIFFICULT TASK - WE HAVE ORGANIZED THE CAMPUS! A MULTI-ETHNIC MOVEMENT HAS BROUGHT THIS CAMPUS CLOSER TO A REAL INTEGRATION OF SECTORS AND IDEAS. THIS IS A REAL VICTORY! PRESIDENT BERNSTEIN AND ALL ADMINISTRATORS KNOW THEY WILL HAVE TO LISTEN. THEY DREAD THE IDEA OF A MULTI-ETHNIC UNITED MOVEMENT."

TAKEAWAYS

The campus of Brandeis University today faces a crisis of the university's persistent marginalization of BIPOC low-income members of its community. Through incidents like the Pearlman Takeover, the archive reveals that this is not a new crisis, but rather a very old one that has repeated throughout history since the university's founding. Though the university prides itself on "progress" and "social justice" enacted through its task forces, memorandums, and solidarity statements throughout the years, the surface-level nature of these actions is laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic and the precarious situations that BIPOC low-income students find themselves in today. Whether it is the over-policing of Black students making them feel unsafe on campus, the lack of funding or support given to the Intercultural Center and Black/Brown-led student organizations, the lack of diversity in the Brandeis Counseling Center, the retention of racist administration staff and faculty, the lack of accountability for dining workers' pay and benefits, the significant cuts to financial aid packages in the middle of a pandemic, or a racist protest policy, Brandeis has a long way to go before BIPOC low-income students will feel safe or welcome on its campus. A useful course of action for students who are affected by these conditions and seek to change them may be to look back in history for valuable lessons to be learned from those who organized resistance in protest of similar conditions on this campus in the past.

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