

The Legacy of Black Student Activism at Brown University: Impact on Racial Progress & Leadership Development Post-1968 Walkout

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

On December 5, 1968, guided by Charles Nichols and led by Black women at Pembroke College, **65 out of 85 Black students from Brown and Pembroke marched to Congdon Street Baptist Church as the Afro-American Society.** This protest marked a turning point for Brown, demanding greater support and recognition from the administration. After three days of occupation and dialogue, the university agreed to key reforms: increasing Black student admissions, hiring more Black staff and faculty, providing enhanced financial support, and establishing an academic program for Black studies. This event underscored the power of activism in shaping university policies toward racial equality.

RESEARCH STATEMENT:

This research aims to examine the enduring impact of the 1968 Walkout at Brown University by exploring its influence on the university's pursuit of racial equality and leadership development. The research intends to shed light on Brown University's ongoing commitment to honoring the legacy of Black student activism and fostering inclusive practices in higher education.

METHODOLOGY:

Qualitative Analysis with Primary Source Documents: *Black Student's Position Paper, Brown University's Response Papers, The Brown Daily Herald, 12 Demands Document signed by the Afro-American Society*

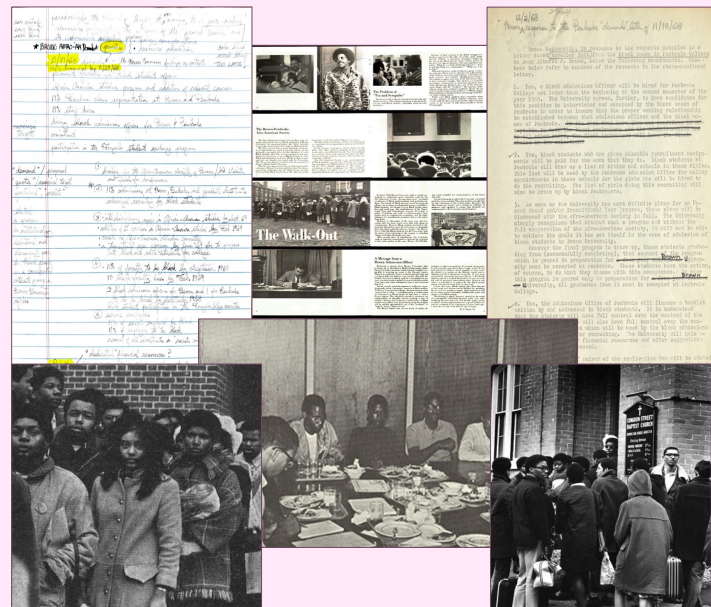
Qualitative Interviews with participants of the Walkout: *Bernicestine McLeod Bailey '68 LHD '23 Hon., P '99 '03 & Harold Bailey '70 LHD '95 Hon.*



"Do you think that the institution has still remained committed to the 12 demands of the Walkout?"

"How would you describe the social climate of Brown and Pembroke during the 1960s?"

"We had a real sense of camaraderie among us. We were in this together and we were going to stick it out together." --- Gail Decosta '69, 1968 Walkout Participant



SELECTED REFERENCES:

Bennett, K. (2018, December 5). On 50th anniversary, alums reflect on black student walkout. The Brown Daily Herald. <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2018/12/on-50th-anniversary-alums-reflect-on-black-student-walkout>

Brown University Library Building a Bridge Back to Brown. (n.d.). Brown University Library. <https://library.brown.edu/create/building-a-bridge-back-to-brown/>

Fifty Years Ago, Black Students At Brown Walked Out For Change | GBH. (2018, December 5). WGBH. <https://www.wgbh.org/news/national/2018-12-05/fifty-years-ago-black-students-at-brown-walked-out-for-change>

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

✓ Racial Progress:

- ✓ Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)
- ✓ Establishment of the Office of Institutional Equity & Diversity,
- ✓ Increase in Black enrollment to 15.1% in the Class of 2026
- ✓ Creation of the Department of Afro-American Studies (now Africana Studies)
- ✓ The Brown Center for Students of Color

✓ Leadership Development:

- ✓ **Dr. Ruth J. Simmons:** First African American president of an Ivy League institution, assuming leadership at Brown University.
- ✓ **Dr. Sylvia R. Carey-Butler:** Vice President for Institutional Equity & Diversity
- ✓ **Logan Powell:** Associate Provost for Enrollment & Dean of Undergraduate Admissions

FUTURE RESEARCH:

Further exploration into the impact of this walkout on subsequent waves of leadership and student activism at other institutions remains an open question. Comparative research could investigate how universities such as **Columbia, San Francisco State, and Yale** responded to similar student movements and demands for racial equity during the same historical period. This comparative analysis would shed light on broader trends and variations in institutional responses to student activism across different academic settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

