

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Bryan Edward Stone, *Associate Managing Editor*

Scott M. Langston, *Primary Sources Section Editor*

Stephen J. Whitfield, *Book Review Editor*

Phyllis Leffler, *Exhibit Review Editor*

2013

Volume 16



Southern Jewish History

Editorial Board

Robert Abzug	Adam Mendelsohn
Dianne Ashton	Dan J. Puckett
Ronald Bayor	David Patterson
Hasia Diner	Jonathan Sarna
Kirsten Fermalicht	Lee Shai Weissbach
Alan Kraut	Stephen J. Whitfield

Southern Jewish History is a publication of the Southern Jewish Historical Society available by subscription and a benefit of membership in the Society. The opinions and statements expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the journal or of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

Southern Jewish Historical Society OFFICERS: Dale Rosengarten, *President*; Ellen Umansky, *President Elect*; Phyllis Leffler, *Secretary*; Les Bergen, *Treasurer*; Jean Roseman, *Corresponding Secretary*; Stuart Rockoff, *Immediate Past President*. BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Rachel Bergstein, Barbara W. Bernstein, P. Irving Bloom, Stephen Bodzin, Robert Gillette, Gil Halpern, May Lynn Mansbach, Beth Orlansky, Dan Puckett, Lee Shai Weissbach. Bernard Wax, *Board Member Emeritus*; EX-OFFICIO: Rayman L. Solomon.

For authors' guidelines, queries, and all editorial matters, write to the Editor, *Southern Jewish History*, 2517 Hartford Dr., Ellenwood, GA 30294; e-mail: Markkbauman@aol.com. For journal subscriptions and advertising, write Rachel Heimovics Braun, managing editor, 954 Stonewood Lane, Maitland, FL 32751; or e-mail: journal@jewishsouth.org; or visit www.jewishsouth.org. For membership and general information about the Southern Jewish Historical Society, write to PO Box 71601, Marietta, GA 30007-1601 or visit www.jewishsouth.org.

Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, *Index to Jewish Periodicals*, *Journal of American History*, *Journal of Southern History*, *RAMBI-National Library of Israel*, *Immigration and Ethnic Historical Society Newsletter*, and the *Berman Jewish Policy Archive* (www.bjpa.org).

Southern Jewish History acknowledges with deep appreciation grants from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, New York, and the Gale Foundation, Beaumont, Texas.

Copyright © 2013 by the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

ISSN 1521-4206

PERMISSION STATEMENT

Consent by the Southern Jewish Historical Society is given for private use of articles and images that have appeared in *Southern Jewish History*. Copying or distributing any journal, article, image, or portion thereof, for any use other than private, is forbidden without the written permission of *Southern Jewish History*. To obtain that permission, contact the editor, Mark K. Bauman, at MarkKBauman@aol.com or the managing editor, Bryan Edward Stone, at bstone@delmar.edu.

Black Mountain and Brandeis: Two Experiments in Higher Education

by

Stephen J. Whitfield*

Among the legendary episodes in the history of American higher education are Harvard under Charles W. Eliot and the University of Chicago under Robert M. Hutchins, plus CCNY in the 1930s and Berkeley in the 1960s. Belonging on that small list is the short life of Black Mountain College, located in the foothills of western North Carolina near Asheville. The college was founded in 1933, never got accredited, and vanished in 1956. Thus its life spanned only twenty-three years. But within that period a highly combustible collection of artists and thinkers juiced up the avant-garde and expanded the contours of American culture so strikingly that the temptation to be elegiac cannot easily be resisted. Just as Black Mountain College was declining and facing the prospect of disappearance, another experiment was inaugurated with the establishment of Brandeis University. If survival counts as a minimal test of institutional success, the contrast with the ill-fated bohemia in the Blue Ridge could not be greater. Brandeis, the world's only Jewish-sponsored, non-sectarian university, has remained very much alive nearly two-thirds of a century after its founding in 1948.

This essay seeks to juxtapose these two educational gambles. No one interested in the development of Black Mountain College, however, can fail to express indebtedness to Martin Duberman, whose history, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, was published a little over four decades ago. Based on research in the

* The author may be contacted at swhitfie@brandeis.edu.

North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh and on taped interviews with several veterans of this experiment in democratic community, his book amply conveys how Black Mountain sought to nurture creative impulses and to promote self-fulfillment. Could the author have done an even better job? In the *New York Times Book Review*, reviewer Herbert Leibowitz felt that Duberman should have engaged in comparative history. Lawrence Veysey, a historian of higher education, echoed that objection, expressing the wish that Duberman had “gone farther in the direction of establishing wider resonances and connections.”¹ In comparing both the spectacular accomplishment and the glum fate of Black Mountain College to the first phase of the evolution of Brandeis University, this essay modestly seeks to satisfy such criticism. Apart from the difference in durability, both institutions smacked of the piquancy of cosmopolitanism and exuded an unconventional aura. Both Black Mountain and Brandeis pioneered in challenging and even defying the parochial features of American culture. The framework of Jewish history in the Diaspora is also salient, as is the afterlife of Weimar culture, which for fifteen glorious years, in Peter Gay’s crisp formulation, transformed outsiders into insiders.²

*Robert E. Lee Hall, of the Blue Ridge Assembly, North Carolina,
the site chosen in 1933 for Black Mountain College.
(Courtesy of Howard Morland, Wikimedia Commons.)*

Both Black Mountain and Brandeis attracted refugees from Germany as well as others who were not quite insiders. They shared some personnel. For example, Erwin Bodky, a pianist and harpsichordist who had studied with Richard Strauss, provided music instruction at Black Mountain and became a full-time member of its faculty soon after World War II. He resigned after the fall semester of 1949 and became the first musician whom Brandeis hired. Five years later Bodky chaired Brandeis's School of Creative Arts. In 1948 Peter Grippe offered classes in sculpture at Black Mountain and, beginning five years later, taught the same subject continuously at Brandeis. Brandeis's student union named Grippe Professor of the Year in 1974, a decade after he won a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1946 Black Mountain hired the painter Jacob Lawrence, celebrated for his *Migration* series depicting the trek of southern blacks to the North. Nineteen years later, when Brandeis established an artist-in-residence program for students in fine arts, Lawrence became the first honoree. Paul Radin, who studied under Franz Boas at Columbia and specialized in Native Americans, took charge of anthropology at Black Mountain in 1942 and in 1944.³ Beginning in 1957, Radin taught the subject at Brandeis, although he died two years later.

Erwin Bodky playing the harpsichord, c. 1950.
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)

Josef Albers constitutes a special case. He ranks among the luminaries of the Bauhaus, the famous school of design located in Weimar, then in Dessau, and finally, briefly, in Berlin from 1922 until 1933. He and his wife, the weaver and textile designer Anni Albers, fled the Third Reich when the Nazis seized power, and they became instructors at Black Mountain. They resigned in 1949. The following year he became chairman of the Art Department at Yale, and soon began his famous series, "Homage to the Square." The administrative responsibility Albers accepted at Yale ended in 1960. Six years later the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis mounted a major exhibition of his work, which exposed viewers, according to one critic, to "the creation of a rich language of expressive form that utilizes the barest economy of visual elements." The Rose Art Museum, which opened at Brandeis in 1961, displayed the works of other famous artists who served on the faculty or studied at Black Mountain—Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and Cy Twombly.⁴

Both Black Mountain and Brandeis were noteworthy for the hospitality that they offered to refugees from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in particular. The opportunity that the college gave to vulnerable academicians and artists was fortuitous, especially since the college was founded in the year that marked the end of the Weimar Republic. In the 1930s, when antisemitism was commonplace in the American academy, the willingness of Black Mountain to provide a safe harbor for a few of the escapees from Nazi-occupied Europe before the Final Solution was imposed and when it mattered is especially striking. Because Brandeis came into existence three years after the defeat of the Third Reich (and coincidentally in the same year that Israel was founded), the campus in Waltham, Massachusetts, could not directly serve as a haven for refugees or save anyone from the flames. But Brandeis did attract to its faculty a few of the survivors from the catastrophe of totalitarianism and global warfare. The post-Holocaust era obliged some members of the Brandeis community to face the terrible, ineffable implications of what had happened; and they preserved fragments of a world that had vanished.

*Josef Albers, front center, with his drawing class, c. 1939–1940.
(Photo by Robert Haas, courtesy of the Western Regional Archives,
State Archives of North Carolina.)*

No one who has examined the Black Mountain experiment has failed to admire the pluck with which it envisioned higher education. Talented faculty found themselves deposited in a small rustic setting, and, in this backwoods bohemia, epiphanies of youthful self-exploration might be expected. Such interaction, the founders of the college believed, would trump the formal advancement of knowledge. They made fixed regulations taboo. They wanted a Black Mountain education to be unstructured and

carefree, which is why the curriculum did not include required courses. Nor did the faculty even bother to record formal grades for student work, which was not punctuated with frequent examinations to measure progress.⁵ Black Mountain reduced and even obliterated the gap between teacher and student, emphasized interaction instead of formal lecturing, and integrated the challenges of learning within a pattern of joint living.

Thus the institution that founding president John Andrew Rice had imagined in breaking away from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, represented a gallant and singular achievement. When the president of Rollins had fired the classicist, half a dozen others either resigned in protest or were dismissed as well; and from that turmoil was born an institution that reveled in its own iconoclasm. Black Mountain, which could scarcely fit into the conventional understanding of higher education, proved to be especially important for the stateless and the persecuted.

Rice's decision to hire Josef Albers, who initially spoke little English, merits appreciation as "perhaps the key decision in Black Mountain's early years," according to Martin Duberman, the author of the only full-scale scholarly history of the institution. Albers's wife, the former Anni Fleischmann, had studied with Paul Klee and also belonged to the Bauhaus.⁶ She claimed to be "Jewish in the Hitler sense" only,⁷ which meant that conversion from Judaism and adherence to Lutheranism permeated her wealthy and assimilated family. Hers was a mixed marriage. Josef Albers was a Roman Catholic, while she remained a Lutheran. An Irish governess had taught her English, enabling Anni Albers to converse with the American architect Philip Johnson in Berlin, as the menace of Nazism was gaining political momentum. Her weavings impressed Johnson. When Rice asked him to recommend an artist to take charge of the new college's academic program, Johnson unhesitatingly named Josef Albers. Her weavings, his wife later claimed, thus became their passports to America. Brandishing non-quota visas, the Alberses arrived at the college in November 1933. The inflection of agrarianism that marked Black Mountain clashed to some extent with the dynamism of Weimar culture and the Bauhaus that aspired to harness

the power of industrialism rather than to reject it. But Josef and Anni Albers helped make the college into a backcountry version of the experimentalism that had ignited the scintillating power of German art after the Great War. The refugee couple turned Black Mountain into a kind of bucolic Bauhaus.⁸

Anni Albers - Weaving, Rolling Thread.

(Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.)

Their great-nephew, the literary scholar Christopher Benfey, has claimed that Josef Albers “ran Black Mountain College during the 1930s and 1940s, when its tremendous impact on American culture was greatest.” This claim would have come as something of a surprise to the tempestuous John Andrew Rice, or others including Robert Wunsch and Theodore Dreier who, besides Albers, served as administrative officers (called rectors). Benfey’s claim also implicitly validates the charge that Black Mountain did not add up to much of a college, because the physical, natural, and social sciences were quite peripheral. It was primarily an arts institute, bereft of an extensive liberal arts curriculum. But there is no denying the influence of the Alberses, who “taught via materi-

als; their deepest lessons lay in the contrast of textures — brick and wood, pebble and leaf.” In the late 1940s, two of the nation’s best-known postwar painters, Kenneth Noland and Robert Rauschenberg, took classes with Albers, the modernist master who — in the words of the first director of the Rose Art Museum — “helped revolutionize the visual vocabulary of art.” In 1949, when the couple resigned, New York’s Museum of Modern Art devoted an exhibition to Anni’s work, the first show mounted by the museum to honor a weaver.⁹ At Black Mountain another veteran of the Bauhaus joined them in 1936, but the theatrical experimentation of Alexander Schawinsky proved to be too bold even for this innovative college, and he departed after two years.¹⁰

Other gifted refugees also became important teachers in other arts. For example, Duberman called Heinrich Jalowetz “probably the most beloved figure in Black Mountain’s history.” Born in what became Czechoslovakia, he had specialized in musicology at the University of Vienna and joined Arnold Schoenberg’s first composition class. For three decades Jalowetz had served as a conductor in Europe, and he became the first to perform the works of Schoenberg, Hindemith, Webern, and Berg, among others. In 1933, while conducting opera in Cologne, Jalowetz was dismissed as a “non-Aryan” and spent the next three years in Vienna, where a Czech passport luckily protected him. After the *Anschluss*, the Third Reich’s bloodless acquisition of Austria, he and his wife fled to the United States, where he applied for a job at Black Mountain.¹¹

The letter of recommendation that Schoenberg sent to the college in 1939 remains thrilling to read. “Among several hundreds of pupils who passed through my forty years of teaching,” Schoenberg wrote from Los Angeles, Jalowetz ranked among the half dozen “who always were the dearest to me.” From the beginning, Schoenberg claimed to have recognized Jalowetz’s “great talent, his sincerity [*sic*] and his ambition to do the very best a real artist could aim for.” Schoenberg often attended the opera performances that Jalowetz conducted in Germany and Austria, “which made me very proud of my pupil.” The composer added: “He is really a lovely man . . . warm, enthusiastic, industrious . . .

and always eager to expand his knowledge of every field available to a man of his background." The candidate also offered to provide endorsements from such giants as Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter.¹² The influence that Jalowetz exerted at Black Mountain College was abbreviated, however, for he died early in 1946, only seven years after his arrival.

*Heinrich Jalowetz, second from the right,
and several Black Mountain College students, c. 1939.
(Photo by Robert Haas, courtesy of the Western Regional Archives,
State Archives of North Carolina.)*

Among Jalowetz's successors was Charlotte Schlesinger, who had tutored musicians in Berlin, Vienna, and Russia. Frederic "Fritz" Cohen and his wife Elsa Kahl, both German-born, came in 1942. Cohen had cofounded and codirected a ballet company in

which Kahl performed as a soloist; and he later directed the Juilliard Opera Theater.¹³

Others at Black Mountain enriched the limited curriculum outside the arts. Max Wilhelm Dehn had served as a professor of mathematics at the University of Frankfurt but was arrested during *Kristallnacht*. By the end of 1938, however, Dehn managed to flee Nazi Germany through Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, and Japan before eventually finding a haven in one patch of the planet—North Carolina. (To be in exile, Bertolt Brecht wrote, meant “changing our country more often than our shoes.”) From 1945 until his death in 1952, Dehn was the only mathematician on the faculty, although he also offered popular courses on Plato and ethics. Richard Gothe, with a doctorate in economics from the University of Berlin, taught that subject at Black Mountain. Both the mother and wife of psychologist Erwin Straus were classified as “Aryan,” but because his father was Jewish, Straus needed to escape from the Third Reich. He joined the faculty in 1938.¹⁴ Born in Frankfurt in 1891, Straus enjoyed a very solid reputation in his field—or rather fields, because he was also a philosopher. Straus pursued innovative work in what became known as phenomenological existentialism. One staffer who examined his file concluded: “He would be a good acquisition because of his scientific attitude and training; his aesthetic and creative interests; and his personality.” Straus remained at Black Mountain for six years.¹⁵

Although these refugees tended to distance themselves from the chummy, touchy-feely ethos that the college championed, their students and their fellow teachers attested to their impact, their authoritative pedagogy, and their formidable erudition.¹⁶ The hospitality of the college ensures its place in the very lively scholarly field that has come to be known as *Exilforschung* (exile research). Only the University in Exile, a division of the New School for Social Research in New York, as well as the black colleges in the rigidly segregated South, could be praised as comparable in the warmth of the welcome that Black Mountain offered to the scorned and desperate artists and academicians fleeing the Third Reich.

Black Mountain also hired as teachers Jews who had not needed passports or visas to survive. These second-generation Americans of eastern European descent differed from the refugees from highly emancipated backgrounds in *Mitteleuropa*. It was commonly the case that the ferocious and systemic hatred of Hitler had made these Germans and Austrians into Jews (though not necessarily good Jews). The Americans whose families had stemmed so recently from Poland and Russia tended to be more inescapably ethnic; their *Yiddishkeit* was palpable. The brevity of their appointments, however (often at summer institutes), meant that Black Mountain exuded little of an emphatically Jewish aura. Despite their limited service, the luster that such teachers added to the college remains impressive. For example, Ben Shahn, who later produced an elegant Haggadah (1965), taught painting and photography.¹⁷ Aaron Siskind also offered instruction in the art of photography. Alfred Kazin, the future author of *New York Jew* (1978), taught literature in 1944. Four years later he helped persuade the institution to hire Isaac Rosenfeld to teach literature and writing. Presumably it did not hurt Rosenfeld's chances that another letter of recommendation came from the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who described him as "gifted," and as possessing "charm," "judgement" and "warmth."¹⁸

A Question of Prejudice

Such institutional exemption from the academic antisemitism that marked the era makes the inclusiveness of Black Mountain seem almost too good to be true. In fact, it was. Not even this progressive institution could entirely emancipate itself from the widespread presumption that too many Jews would adversely affect the social atmosphere of learning. Black Mountain explicitly addressed the issue of whether the Jewish presence was too pronounced for so tiny a college. Frederick R. Mangold, who served as secretary while teaching Romance languages, was proud of the "policy of taking [so] many refugee scholars on our faculty." But because its composition was "quite small," he informed the director of the Institute of International Education of the limits that had

to be imposed upon the number of the foreign-born "we can assimilate at any given time."¹⁹ Black Mountain was certainly less prejudiced against Jews than many more prestigious and tradition-encrusted institutions of higher learning. "To hate the Negro and avoid the Jew/Is the curriculum," Karl Shapiro bitterly proclaimed in his 1940 poem, "University." He had attended the University of Virginia, but his excoriation of discrimination is confirmed in a spate of scholarly works devoted to policies of hiring and admission, especially in the Ivy League.²⁰ Archival research has revealed that during the Great Depression, even letters of recommendation betrayed the commonplace scope of academic bias. For example, Daniel J. Boorstin was "a Jew, though not the kind to which one takes exception." Another promising historian, Oscar Handlin, was praised for having "none of the offensive traits which some people associate with his race."²¹

This was the sea of prejudice in which Black Mountain College was obliged to swim, and again there, too, discussions took place concerning limits that might be placed upon the number of Jewish students and faculty. Discussants could not agree upon the exact proportion, however. Theodore Dreier, a physicist and mathematician, wondered, for example, whether more than ten percent of the student body should be Jewish.²² Nonetheless, a quota for Jewish applicants for admission went undefined, and whatever informal barrier may have been set at Black Mountain seems to have been easily scaled.²³ The aura of discrimination that did fester was directed in particular at candidates who came across as "too Jewish." For their own good, it was argued, their admission could in fairness be rejected, because they would not smoothly adapt to a community in rural North Carolina.²⁴

Black Mountain College was hardly unique in confronting a challenge to the social definition and texture of the institution, a test of identity that qualified Jewish supplicants presumably posed. Elsewhere, the American academy in the interwar era showed very little desire to accommodate itself to the influx of a minority that might well alter the character of the campus. Exactly a decade after the issue surfaced at Black Mountain, Brandeis University was founded to ensure that no qualified Jewish appli-

cant would face such obstacles. The same policy was designed to apply to faculty hires at Brandeis, a Jewish-sponsored university explicitly envisioned to repudiate any discriminatory practice. If a justification for the birth of Brandeis could be traced to the policy at Black Mountain, the case would stand or fall with an economist named Maure Leonard Goldschmidt.

Black Mountain expected the funding to fill the opening for which Goldschmidt was considered to come from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. The antecedents of its endowment had come from the mining fortune of a Swiss-Jewish immigrant, Meyer Guggenheim. The foundation was especially devoted to the patronage of scholarship and the arts. In the inter-war period, wealthy Jews could often be counted on to be generous to both Jewish and general causes—but rich gentiles were rarely asked to confront the international crisis inflamed by Nazi antisemitism. The Rockefeller Foundation, for example, agreed to help refugee scholars after 1933. But John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was personally reluctant to become a “Christian martyr” (his term) all by himself, and told an official of the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees that the Rockefeller Foundation could continue to subsidize such relocation only “if four or five large Christian contributions could be secured.” Unfortunately even the Carnegie Corporation, this official noted, was already “beginning to tire of the refugee problem,” and was running out of patience as early as 1935.²⁵ Those gifts did not come through; and just as Jewish donors were responsible for establishing the only chairs in Jewish thought and Jewish history at Harvard and Columbia, respectively, Black Mountain College asked the Guggenheim Foundation to underwrite the hiring of Goldschmidt in 1938. The situation then grew more complex.

A specialist in the field of public administration, Goldschmidt brandished bachelor’s degrees from Reed and Oxford. Competing with a historian, Gerald Barnes, the economist faced potential impediments to his candidacy. Goldschmidt had not yet earned a doctorate from the University of Chicago, and he was married (a status that was relevant to a community that prized togetherness, perhaps even over privacy). Black Mountain had

just hired Erwin Straus, and bringing Goldschmidt on board would immediately have added another Jew to the faculty. Dreier, who had helped found the college, expressed his concern to the Board of Fellows, in reporting a conversation with Robert Wunsch, who taught theater.

Wunsch exercised special authority on campus. While serving as drama coach at Rollins College, he had proposed the site where the breakaway faculty would establish the new college in western North Carolina. He had imagined how a group of buildings, dominated by Robert E. Lee Hall and owned by the Blue Ridge Assembly of the Protestant Church, could form the campus of an institution of higher learning. (In the summers during the 1930s, the Blue Ridge Assembly regained control of the campus to sponsor religious conferences—or, as Mangold once exclaimed, “nine hundred vegetarian nincompoops . . . the damnedest thing I ever saw.”)²⁶ Wunsch, a native of North Carolina, had attended the state university at Chapel Hill where he briefly roomed with an ambitious young writer from Asheville, Thomas Wolfe. (Wunsch, a homosexual, hurriedly and permanently departed the college in 1945 after the police discovered him in a parked car committing “crimes against nature” with a member of the Marine Corps.)²⁷ Among the Black Mountain faculty, Wunsch and Dreier perhaps showed the greatest candor in expressing themselves on the subject of the implications of Goldschmidt’s Jewishness.

Wunsch and Dreier agreed that “we could not ignore the racial factor in considering the Barnes-Goldschmidt decision. We both wished that we did not have to consider this, but both of us felt that it would be a great mistake to have Goldschmidt, aside from other considerations (which in themselves make me favor Barnes).” Dreier drew a comparison to the admission of female applicants. Too many female applicants to the student body, he explained, would mean that “we won’t get anything but girls. And if we have too many Jews, we won’t get anything but Jews, which would be a mistake, I think.” Wunsch argued that Black Mountain would miss a historian more than an economist, and he therefore preferred Barnes. Dreier “is strongly against our taking on the Goldschmidts because they are Jewish,” Wunsch

noted, "and I think he is justified in considering that aspect of the problem." It would constitute "an overbalance." "If we should take on the Goldschmidts," Dreier reportedly warned, then "we would have our full quota of Jewish faculty members." For his own sake, Goldschmidt should not be hired, Dreier warned. Moreover, because Goldschmidt's work in economics was dismissed as "second-rate," the future availability of an abler candidate would obligate Black Mountain to dismiss Goldschmidt.

According to Dreier, the Board of Fellows also solicited the opinion of the most famous refugee on the faculty. With twenty solo shows in the United States between 1933 and 1945, Albers had achieved greater recognition in his adopted land than he had ever managed to earn at the Bauhaus. Nonetheless, he did not object to lifting the gangplank behind him. Disclaiming sufficient knowledge of what he delicately called "the racial situation" of "colleges in this country," Albers remained neutral amid this conflict over the hiring of a Jewish refugee. Mangold realized that the need to include an economist on the faculty was also at issue, and others noted that Black Mountain lacked the resources to offer a salary that would attract either "a first-rate economist" or "a first-rate Jew." Wunsch acknowledged, "we can afford only second-class teachers at this time." Although favoring Goldschmidt over Barnes in terms of individual merit, Mangold added, "I do not believe that the fact that Goldschmidt is Jewish has any bearing whatsoever on the decision." The importance of antisemitism as a factor in the choice of Barnes, who was hired for the 1938-1939 academic year, cannot be conclusively ascertained; and Duberman's book fails to mention the episode at all.²⁸

Two years later another murky situation occurred at Harvard, which forfeited the chance to keep a first-rate Jew who was also a first-rate economist: Paul Samuelson. Although elected to the Society of Fellows, "Antisemitism blunted Samuelson's prospects," two historians of Harvard assert, and so he adorned the faculty of MIT instead. Discrimination may not have been the only factor that caused Harvard to lose a future Nobel laureate, but it apparently was a factor.²⁹

When Black Mountain College was in its prime, Jews could hardly claim to be the chief victims of the commonplace processes of bigotry. Until the postwar era, only two blacks could be seen at the college—and they served as cooks.³⁰ The institution was, according to a Brooklyn-born sculptor and arts teacher, David Weinrib, “a northern college in the South,” but the regional mores could not be directly and openly challenged. When Jim Crow was the law of the South, the security of Black Mountain as a hotbed of experimentation could easily be imperiled. It was, after all, “an alien presence” from the perspective of its conservative neighbors, historian Leonard Rogoff maintains. In the year that Black Mountain was founded, the governing body considered an invitation to an African American guest. But “the Board of Fellows, without consulting the students or even all members of the tiny faculty, decided that although it unanimously disagreed with local mores, it would be safer to respect them,” Duberman concluded. He added that no one at Black Mountain believed in or defended the segregation that pervaded the region. Yet to defy white supremacy would risk the safety of the community and even undermine the chances of institutional survival. “Locked into a hillside in the heartland of white fundamentalism,” the leadership of the college, Duberman added, feared that the arrival of a black visitor “would probably have been suicidal” for the institution.³¹

The South was nevertheless changing, however glacially. Consider what happened a little more than a decade later to Ernst Manasse, a refugee scholar who taught philosophy and German at North Carolina College for Negroes (later North Carolina Central University). Manasse recommended a black colleague, who taught economics and served as the campus minister, for membership in the Southern Society for the Philosophy of Religion. The recommendation was rejected; after all, the hotels where the society conducted its meetings would certainly refuse to accommodate Manasse’s colleague. Manasse thereupon resigned from the society. But that gesture soon produced a surprise: the organization decided to change its whites-only policy.³² Another sign of change occurred in 1943, when Black Mountain College dared to celebrate

Negro History Week. The program included lectures by the faculty and invitations to black high school teachers from Asheville as guests on campus. The YMCA and YWCA soon sponsored an interracial conference there as well.

A troubling question remained, however. Should black applicants to Black Mountain College be admitted as early as the fall 1944 semester? That question provoked genuine controversy, and from January through April an open debate raged. (In that same year Gunnar Myrdal published *An American Dilemma*.) Oddly enough, matriculation would probably not have been illegal. The North Carolina legislature had not enacted any laws expressly prohibiting racial integration in higher education, perhaps because no elected politician had been imaginative enough to foresee such a challenge to Jim Crow. Besides, even if such a law had been passed, it might not have affected an unaccredited college.³³ Black Mountain's ethos was so liberal that everyone on the faculty favored desegregation—in principle. Anthropologist Paul Radin also favored it in practice. He claimed that he was “always a radical” and that the faculty knew his politics when he was hired. The son of a rabbi, Radin nonetheless espoused Marxism.³⁴ The Jalowetzes and the Cohens joined him in favoring the immediate admission of black students. However other refugees, including the cautious Alberses and especially Straus, feared what they called “precipitous action.” The timing was wrong, they argued. With only fifty students enrolled, Black Mountain's very existence might be jeopardized. Local merchants might boycott the college, and the possibility of violence could not be ignored.³⁵ Critics of “precipitous” desegregation may not have acknowledged the connection between European Judeophobia and American racism. But they were certainly aware of their luck in finding refuge at Black Mountain and securing gainful employment among strangers. Why take chances, they asked, with so much at stake?

The split in the faculty was therefore understandable, and the debate so intense that the community was ripped apart. Those reluctant to risk the viability of the institution for the sake of racial justice ended up on the losing side, and champions of a limited

policy of desegregation emerged victorious. The faculty agreed that in 1945 the Music and Art Institutes would admit two African Americans. A fund that the Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald of Chicago had established would provide their scholarships and expenses. The college subsequently admitted a full-time black student and hired a black faculty member. The new policy was also gender-specific. Rather than activate the notorious southern rape complex, the new members of the community would all have to be women. Their status remained insecure. The first to arrive at Black Mountain came from the rural South and were somehow expected to blend into a sophisticated, all-white student body, many of whom had grown up in northern cities. This was a guarantee of discomfort and displacement, if not alienation. Moreover escape from such pressures was impossible. Black students who ventured into nearby towns or Asheville were thrown back into a system of humiliation and exclusion and were obligated to respect the laws and customs of white supremacy. So black students rarely left the campus. No wonder then that, of the first five who matriculated at Black Mountain College, four failed to return for the fall semester in 1947. Estranged by the color line and finding the culture of the institution foreign, very few blacks applied thereafter.³⁶ Thanks to this premature episode of desegregation, Black Mountain College thus shares with so much else in the marrow of southern experience the entanglements of race and place.

Although ultimately spared spasms of violence, "Black Mountain was surrounded by the fiercest suspicion," Alfred Kazin recalled. In this respect Brandeis University was far luckier. Differences in social texture between the two sections of the nation should be noted here, to provide historical context. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, which currently runs to twenty-four volumes, is a reference work that is as close to comprehensive as any reader could conceive. The entire Volume 19 is devoted to the subject of "Violence." By contrast *The Encyclopedia of New England* consists of only one hefty volume, scrutinizing half as many states.³⁷ Its editors include no section or chapter on violence, a term that does not even appear in the index. Nor, beginning in the 1950s, did any state nurture more klaverns than did North Caroli-

na, where membership in the United Klans of America exceeded that of all the other states of the former Confederacy combined.³⁸ Pockets of liberalism and tolerance certainly existed in the South, not least in North Carolina itself; and regional differences should not be exaggerated for the sake of formulating paradigmatic abstractions such as ideal types. But divergence from social and cultural patterns elsewhere in the nation did exist, and visitors to the South could not help commenting upon its distinctiveness. Whites living in the South who recognized the structure of racial injustice could not fail to be aware of how beleaguered and even isolated they were, and how easily the bigots surrounding them could be aroused and inflamed. The geniality of a phrase like “Y’all come back” was rarely extended to “outside agitators” who threatened to destabilize the least educated and most violent section of the nation. The membranes of civilization could be thin indeed.

The Eclipse of an Experiment

The ubiquity of racial prejudice in the region did not cause the decline and demise of Black Mountain College. But neither can the brevity of this educational experiment be utterly divorced from the pressures of its surroundings. It lacked communal support, the sort of local allegiance and dedication that has enabled far less distinguished colleges elsewhere to survive. Black Mountain was *in* but not *of* North Carolina. Although a black female rabbi, Alysa Stanton, would one day serve a synagogue in Greenville, that milestone would not occur until 2009, when behavioral distinctions between the dictates of custom and the affirmation of nonconformity would blur.³⁹ In the immediate postwar era, Black Mountain College still came across as a little too bohemian, and so it was almost hermetically sealed off from its neighbors, who were still paying homage to the square and the conventional. The majority of applicants to Black Mountain lived in the Northeast, and came mostly from New York and Massachusetts—a geographic profile that strikingly resembled the applicant pool for Brandeis. In upbringing and experience, neither the students nor the faculty at Black Mountain were programmed to honor the mores of the

host culture, with its suspicion of deviancy and with the moral rigidity of its Protestantism. Religiosity made Buncombe County dry, and the state's Baptists formally prohibited dancing among the faithful.⁴⁰ The cosmopolitan character of the college therefore made it anomalous in a region where utopians and experimentalists rarely felt welcome. Black Mountain never managed to lure students from Asheville or its immediate environs. In this regard, Asheville residents Kenneth Noland and his two brothers were quite exceptional. Only in 1956, the year that the college closed, did the North Carolina Museum of Art open to the public as the nation's first state museum; and only later did North Carolina officially promote itself as a petri dish for aesthetic novelty, as "the state of the arts."⁴¹

Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College.

(Photo by Hazel Larsen Archer, courtesy of Mondo.blog.blogspot.com.)

To appreciate the backwardness of the North Carolina of that era, consider the experience of Arthur Miller. He visited the state in late 1941 to record regional accents for the Folklore Division of the Library of Congress. His task was to interview ordinary citizens, and it was Miller's first visit to the South.⁴² While meeting with the head of the health service in North Carolina, Miller made the mistake of calling a black man "mister." The physician, previously friendly, was infuriated, and asked Miller to step outside, where he was warned: "You must never address a Negro as 'mister.'" Miller asked: "What am I supposed to call him?" The answer was: "Boy." Miller recalled: "I was twenty-five years old and this man was sixty!" Nor was the doctor's diet a model of healthy eating: "For breakfast he had four small bags of peanuts and two Coca-Colas. In the corner of his office were cases of Coca-Cola. He was the head of the health service of the state of North Carolina!" the future playwright recalled with some astonishment.⁴³ Such an atmosphere helps account for the isolation of Black Mountain College and may well have reinforced its inward tendency, which enfeebled the institution as well. Its peculiarly democratic, hang-loose character probably guaranteed that Black Mountain would have failed to sustain itself anywhere. But certainly the absence of support from the immediate surroundings did not help.

That sympathizers with liberal educational experimentation did not achieve hegemony in the region is not to deny or disparage its progressive tradition. The most influential of southern historians, C. Vann Woodward, made a career out of the impulse (both professional and personal) to retrieve this tradition, and his successors have included Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Daniel J. Singal, Sheldon Hackney, Glenda Gilmore, and Patricia Sullivan. Nor was Black Mountain the only experimental institution to locate itself in the South. Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, is perhaps the most famous. But others should also be listed: folk schools like Highlander in Grundy County, Tennessee (which helped shape the activism of Rosa Parks), and John C. Campbell in Brasstown, North Carolina; the Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, near Black Mountain itself; and the Penland School of Crafts in Spruce Pine, North Carolina.⁴⁴ The novelist and critic Lillian Smith

headed Laurel Falls Camp in Georgia, an educational institution devoted primarily to the arts, while achieving national prominence for her unsparing condemnation of white supremacy. These schools shared with Black Mountain a commitment to innovative liberal education. How much weight to attach to their importance in the history of higher education in the South is a question of legitimate scholarly dispute. But what is not debatable is the particular difficulty that Black Mountain itself faced, a tendency that would have doomed the institution even had it been located in much more welcoming climes.

The college confronted and finally could not solve a deeper, internal problem. What sorts of students found Black Mountain congenial? Which applicants would be attracted to an institution that no federal or regional agency ever accredited? Allowing for exceptions like the future film director Arthur Penn (*Bonnie and Clyde*), the students tended to be loners and castoffs who were unsuited for traditional classrooms. Kazin remembered the ambience as “a gallery of the higher neuroticism.” He could not imagine any graduate “who was not a complete intellectual nebbish.”⁴⁵ In any case, very few attendees graduated.⁴⁶ After all, such certification of academic achievement smacked of bourgeois values rather than the bohemianism of iconoclasts. One graduate, however, was the Jalowetzes’ daughter Elisabeth. She moved from North Carolina to New York to become a stage designer—the vocation of her distinguished husband, Boris Aronson, who designed the sets for *Fiddler on the Roof* and four Stephen Sondheim musicals, as well as other Broadway shows. Perhaps Black Mountain’s most conspicuous failure was the puny size of the applicant pool. The student body never numbered more than ninety, and by 1948 the enrollment had dropped to fifty.⁴⁷

The collegial commitment to self-government hastened the process of self-destruction. The school administration treated outsiders gingerly. Initially the Board of Fellows consisted of some faculty members and included the founding instigator, John Andrew Rice, but no outsiders. Whatever independence was gained and whatever cohesive sense of self-reliance might have been fostered must be weighed against the difficulty of raising the funds

to keep the college viable. Financing was exceedingly precarious. Black Mountain lacked an endowment, a consequence of confining authority to the faculty, which sometimes had to go an entire year without drawing any salary. One can safely assume that, when staff and faculty are not compensated, their tempers are more likely to flare. The austerity of the economic and material conditions may well have fostered strength of character. Nonetheless, tensions were undoubtedly exacerbated, and the task of teaching pro bono probably failed to soften the edges of communal living. During the cold winter of 1954–1955, funds were so depleted that almost no money was left to buy coal, and classes had to be suspended for three months.⁴⁸

The governing approach was supposed to be consensual and democratic. But the community suffered emotionally wrenching cleavages. Even though it treated authority without deference, strong personalities could take advantage of the spirit of mutual respect, triggering divisions that made a mockery of the ideal of *gemeinschaft*. Rice's most noteworthy attributes, according to Martin Duberman's index, included "abrasiveness," "bluntness," and "destructiveness." Such traits surely affected Rice's capacity to make the college viable, a going concern.⁴⁹ Moreover, a rather high price of living together was the loss of privacy. With teachers, students, and families thrown into the mix of a holistic community, autonomous space was constricted. The intimacy that was promoted inevitably became too clammy for some of the residents. "There was an extreme demand for love at Black Mountain," Kazin recollected. "No teacher living side by side with so many damaged souls and hungry minds could satisfy it."⁵⁰ Anni Albers, a faculty member married to a rector, recalled their exhaustion due to "the constant tension, and the constant lack of privacy, and constant lack of money, and the constant friction."⁵¹

Too few of the teaching staff willingly bore the burden. Black Mountain could boast of a star-studded faculty, festooned with Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Lyonel Feininger, Charles Olson, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Paul Goodman, and Eric Bentley (who became the leading American champion of Brecht). But the luster of avant-garde art could not fully disguise the thinness of

the rest of the curriculum. The 1944 split generated the departures of faculty members who had wanted to accelerate the pace of desegregation. Their withdrawal meant that immediately afterwards no instruction could be given in economics, history, psychology, or languages.⁵² No social scientist of professional distinction ever taught there. The sciences were always weak, and, after 1944, they became even weaker. The laboratories and library were so poor that the college never had a chance to earn state accreditation.

Two theoretical physicists constitute partial exceptions, however, to the dearth of scientific talent. The Brooklyn-born, MIT-educated Nathan Rosen served as an assistant to Albert Einstein at Princeton from 1934 until 1936 and fortified the Nobel laureate's resistance to quantum theory. Rosen then taught at Kiev State University in Ukraine, at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill from 1941 to 1953, and finally at the Technion in Haifa. He is credited with playing a pivotal role in elevating the Technion to the status of a world-class scientific institution. But Rosen's formal association with Black Mountain College was confined to a summer session in 1941. Only one important scientist taught there longer: Peter Bergmann. A German-born Jew who reached the United States in 1936, he also served as Einstein's assistant at Princeton from that year until 1941, when Bergmann joined the faculty at Black Mountain. There he finished his first and perhaps most influential book, *Introduction to the Theory of Relativity* (1942). This textbook taught a generation of physicists, including the future Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg, how to grasp and teach general relativity. But Bergmann and his wife, Margot, who taught chemistry at Black Mountain, remained there for only one year.

By 1948 no funds remained for certain staffing positions that might elsewhere have been considered essential. The institution lacked a registrar, a bookkeeper, a dietitian, and a maintenance man. By that year Black Mountain could scarcely pretend to be a college.⁵³ At mid-century the college's enrollment reached a melancholy state of free fall, down from about forty-five students in the 1949–1950 academic term to about two dozen three years later. The treasury hemorrhaged to the point that the faculty could not

be remunerated. By 1954, nine students—one of whom had attempted suicide—learned whatever Black Mountain professed to offer from even fewer members of the “staff.” A slight bump at the end increased enrollment to twelve and then fifteen students; but the line between them and the teaching staff had become obscured. The poet Robert Duncan, something of a polymath, served as the last great faculty addition. True to the gloriously eccentric spirit that had animated the creation of Black Mountain College, Duncan offered a course in Persian history.⁵⁴ In a typical year of that final decade, fewer students were attending the college than the number of astronauts who have landed on the moon.

Black Mountain had been established after a crisis of intellectual freedom at Rollins College, and the faculty and administration learned the value of academic self-governance a little too well. The origins of Brandeis University were quite different.

An Experiment Near Boston

It emerged from the sting of antisemitism that had afflicted many of the nation’s stellar colleges and universities—roughly in Brandeis University’s own neighborhood. The force of academic antisemitism in the Northeast in particular, in an era when Jewish applicants for admission faced few such barriers in the South, is a warning against the tendency to emphasize prejudice in one region. Founded not by disgruntled faculty but mostly by Jewish businessmen based in Boston, Brandeis was located about a dozen miles west of the city in the largely working-class town of Waltham. There the founding trustees took over the financially strapped Middlesex University (also known as Middlesex Medical School). It had an unaccredited veterinary program and a charter for its medical program that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts threatened to revoke. The founders enlisted the involvement of Albert Einstein. Einstein had found a haven in the United States a decade and a half earlier, but was dismayed by the extent of campus antisemitism.⁵⁵ The trustees of the new institution completed the transaction and took full control in 1947, while the death rattle of Black Mountain College could already be faintly heard. The first class of Brandeis students was to be admitted in the early fall

of the following year, and the trustees selected Abram L. Sachar, a scholar of Jewish history, as the first president. Academics had founded Black Mountain College, but Brandeis began under very different auspices. Of its eight founders, only three had earned college degrees. Only one of the initial trustees, Dudley Kimball, a holdover from the Middlesex University board, was a non-Jew. Of the other five pioneering trustees, only one was native-born. None of the remaining four had even graduated from high school, nor could they speak an unaccented English.⁵⁶

*The Irving and Edyth Usen Castle, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1940s.
Formerly the site of Middlesex Medical School,
this was the original home of Brandeis University.
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

*Albert Einstein and the "New England Associates," Princeton, 1947.
Prominent Jews from the Boston area met in Einstein's home to support
establishing a non-sectarian Jewish sponsored university in Waltham.
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

Unsurprisingly, these novices betrayed little familiarity with the intricacies of academic life. One trustee, for instance, apparently did not realize that teaching loads are reckoned in terms of hours per week. Having asked a young faculty member, historian Leonard W. Levy, how much he taught and getting the answer "twelve hours," the trustee thought for a moment and commented: "That's a pretty good working day. President Sachar sure expects a lot from his faculty."⁵⁷ In building the university, Sachar depended on the philanthropy of such businessmen, especially

nouveaux-riches Jews who had come—or whose parents had come—from eastern Europe.⁵⁸ One of them, Jacob Goldfarb, funded the library. Upon learning that Sachar was intending to sell off each room to other donors, Goldfarb gallantly offered to remove his own name from the library so that the president could sell it all over again.⁵⁹ Sachar gave these mostly self-made entrepreneurs a chance to feel that they could give something back to a nation that had enabled them to prosper. In the Old World such merchants might have been disdained as parvenus. But in Waltham they were elevated, through Sachar's charm, eloquence, and persistence, into patrons of learning. Sachar's fund-raising skills were legendary. However fragile the new university's financial condition might be, it was enviable compared to the desperation of Black Mountain's.

Nor was Brandeis insulated from its environment. Although the earliest trustees lived in the surrounding area, their reach was national, and they aspired to enlist the sponsorship of Jews throughout the United States. Brandeis was more academically ambitious than Black Mountain College. By 1953 the university had set what a historian of Massachusetts higher education called "a regional speed record," getting full accreditation from the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.⁶⁰ Brandeis had graduated its first senior class only a year earlier. A free-wheeling and unconventional hiring policy also produced, according to a leading historian of Jewish academicians, "probably the nation's most bizarre faculty."⁶¹ The lone exception to that claim was undoubtedly Black Mountain itself. The two institutions shared an unorthodox willingness to dispense with formal credentials. Interdepartmental barriers could be easily scaled at Brandeis, which encouraged "a passion for the place," Levy recalled. "And everyone was a little off-center or unconventional in some significant way. . . . Brandeis was different, really different."⁶²

Hiring seemed to come out of nowhere. None was more unusual than the appointment of the drama critic Louis Kronenberger, who had been a staff writer for *Fortune*, even though he had never earned an undergraduate degree. So why not encourage him to

offer courses in modern and Restoration comedy? The nascent Department of Theater Arts needed those subjects to be taught, and Kronenberger had become the chief Broadway reviewer for *Time* when he agreed to commute between New York and Waltham beginning in 1951. It seems superfluous to add that Kronenberger lacked a degree in library science. So why not also put him in charge of the library? The books were shelved in the former stables of the defunct veterinary school. Many of the initial thousand volumes or so consisted of medical and veterinary texts, as well as popular fiction more suitable for summer beaches than for the stacks. However, the collection expanded quickly and dramatically. In 1951, for example, Brandeis received treasures from the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Collection, which Hannah Arendt and others had helped salvage immediately after the war from the ruins of Jewish libraries in Nazi-occupied Europe, especially from German and Austrian institutions. Kronenberger was nevertheless an odd choice. Because of his tight schedule as a commuter, his time on the campus consisted mostly of delivering lectures on drama, so he had barely set foot in the library. He recalled protesting to Sachar that “about libraries I knew nothing, not even about the Dewey Decimal System—which, for that matter, Brandeis didn’t use” anyway.⁶³ Perfect!

The most famous faculty member at Black Mountain College was undoubtedly R. Buckminster Fuller, whose family had attended Harvard for five generations. He wanted the young “to reform the environment instead of trying to reform man.”⁶⁴ But he was apolitical. By contrast the most famous theorist in the history of Brandeis was a German-born radical. Herbert Marcuse came to the campus in 1954 as a professor of politics with a joint appointment in the History of Ideas program. Like the sociologist Lewis Coser and the literary critic Irving Howe, who cofounded the socialist journal *Dissent* on the campus in the same year, Marcuse had never held a full-time tenured position before coming to Brandeis. When it offered him the first professorship that he ever held, he was fifty-four years old. It says something about the heterodox manner of recruitment that the list of the English-language publications on his CV consisted of exactly one book, a revision of

his dissertation on Hegel published thirteen years earlier, plus one book review.

*Buckminster Fuller (white hair) and students reconstructing
and demonstrating the dome, summer 1949.*

The man on the right is Josef Albers.

(Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.)

Marcuse cut an incongruous figure in a decade when the nation's most popular work of nonfiction (other than the Bible, which was not classified as fiction) was the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Marcuse insisted on the value of negative thinking, of ideological opposition to industrial and consumer capitalism. He exalted what he later called "the great refusal," and his 1955 *Eros and Civilization* imagines a

utopia utterly bereft of sexual repression. No one could have foreseen during the 1950s the stunning, imminent emergence of an international New Left, much less that Marcuse would often be designated as its unofficial faculty advisor. In 1968, at the crest of the radical movement, protesting students at the University of Rome, for instance, brandished signs with the alliterative names of Marx, Mao, and Marcuse.⁶⁵ As one of the marquee names of Marxist thought, Marcuse also remains the only past or present Brandeis faculty member whom the Vatican ever explicitly and specifically condemned. Singling out Freud and Marcuse in 1969, Pope Paul VI denounced the “disgusting and unbridled” manifestations of eroticism, the “animal, barbarous and subhuman degradations” that were “cloaked as liberty” and packaged as emancipation “from conventional scruples.” His Eminence’s exco-riation sounds like the caricature of Black Mountain College that its own local enemies portrayed; and a later Pope echoed the hostility to *Eros and Civilization* by reassuring the faithful that in heaven, unlike earth, there is no sex.⁶⁶

*Herbert Marcuse lecturing at Brandeis in the 1960s.
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

The arts at their best are sublime and provide pleasure, and the curriculum at Black Mountain was designed primarily for aesthetes who could be bewitched by sonnets and sonatas. Because the rustic Carolina locale was politically uncongenial, it undoubtedly reinforced a tendency toward disengagement from civic life. The stance that Black Mountain took toward American society was not notably adversarial or critical, but it could be described as more of a defensive crouch. Here, too, the contrast with Brandeis must be highlighted. From the beginning Brandeis adopted a position that was emphatically on the left—or at least allergic to conservatism. Commencement speakers in the early years were invariably pillars of the Democratic Party: Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Senator Paul H. Douglas of Illinois, and Dean Acheson, who had been a former law clerk to Justice Louis Brandeis. In September 1957, when the new first-year class arrived, four faculty speakers participated in a program to welcome the freshmen. The speakers lined up as unstintingly progressive: Democrat John P. Roche of the Department of Politics, and a future national chairman of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action; the social democrat and former Trotskyist Irving Howe of the Department of English; and two colleagues even further to their left—Stanley Diamond of the Department of Anthropology and, speaking on the topic of “The Nuisance Value of a University,” Herbert Marcuse.⁶⁷

Brandeis situated itself in a state where abolitionism had flourished a century earlier and where sympathy for civil rights in postwar America confronted little resistance. Black Mountain could not easily have made operational sentiments like racial egalitarianism, but the policies of the newly founded university in Massachusetts reflected an ideal of social justice. In the effort to play institutional host in a more open society, Brandeis deliberately broke barriers in the effort to include African Americans. The nation’s leading black magazine certainly appreciated a pledge of nondiscrimination in admissions. “America’s newest university,” *Ebony* proclaimed in 1952, “operates on a set of democratic principles which could easily serve as goals for every other university in the United States. There are no quotas

*Abram L. Sachar and a group of freshmen in his home,
a welcoming tradition created by the Brandeis president.
This group displays the diversity of Brandeis's student body.
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

limiting students of any religion and no racial barriers at Brandeis University."⁶⁸

The tribute that *Ebony* paid was explicit. In a spread that ran even before any student graduated from Brandeis, the magazine emphasized that application forms for admission did not inquire into either race or religion and that "no fraternities or exclusive invitational clubs" or secret societies existed on the campus. The "University uses attractive pictures of Negro students in its school calendar and brochures," the monthly added. The result was that eight black students plus one faculty member, physicist Robert A. Thornton, could be found on the Brandeis campus. Theresa Danley, for example, was portrayed in *Ebony* with her Jewish and

Catholic roommates, though the magazine noted that blacks wishing to be domiciled with other blacks enjoyed the right to do so. Of the six males in this cohort, five played on the varsity football team. A photo showed one black player, Robert Griffin, dancing with a white coed. Such camaraderie was what the concurrent, legal segregation of southern institutions of higher learning was designed to avoid. One black student, Glenda Graham, told *Ebony* that she preferred to eat kosher in the Brandeis cafeteria: "The line is shorter and I love the way the food tastes." Another undergraduate added: "I feel just as if there are all Negro students here. That signifies just how relaxed I am."⁶⁹ The contrast with the simultaneous plight of the handful of black students at Black Mountain College is obvious. In 1967, when guard K. C. Jones retired from the Boston Celtics, Brandeis immediately hired him to coach varsity basketball. He may have been the first black coach of a major sport – not merely basketball – to be hired in any predominantly "white" institution.⁷⁰

Vestiges of Weimar

The histories of both Black Mountain and Brandeis incorporate the saga of the migration of people and ideas from Europe to the United States. But their histories diverge, because surroundings do matter. The mind of the South, for example, exalts fidelity to roots, and therefore at least some of the fortunate survivors from central Europe would continue to feel uncertain and wary in the region. But diasporic Jewry reveals a pattern that is less about roots than about routes – and one destination was Waltham, Massachusetts. There Brandeis could miraculously revive elements of the culture of pre-Nazi Germany. The quest to define a coherent patrimony among the refugee intellectuals and artists, the effort to specify what they shared as well as what differentiated them from others, is bound to be elusive. No historian could plausibly invoke a commonality of vision that would bind, say, Josef Albers and Herbert Marcuse, or Heinrich Jalowetz and Lewis Coser. But perhaps what made Weimar culture distinctive was its acute realization of the fragility of the bourgeois order; its sense that neither liberalism nor meliorism could withstand the dark forces of

the irrational and the subterranean that would bubble to the surface in 1933.⁷¹

Let one episode serve to conclude this account of how the New World could recapture the artistic grandeur of Weimar Germany. Its most popular and enduring cultural artifact may well have been *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which opened in Berlin in 1928 with music by Kurt Weill and lyrics and libretto by Bertolt Brecht. Five years later *The Threepenny Opera* was staged in New York, where, after only twelve performances, this fiercely satiric musical suffered an ignominious death. No one in the United States dared to attempt a revival until 1952, when *The Threepenny Opera* was featured in the first Festival of the Arts at Brandeis. Weill, the son of a cantor from Dessau, had died two years earlier. But his widow, Lotte Lenya, who had made her stellar Weimar reputation in the role of "Pirate Jenny," sang it on campus. The translation and adaptation were by Marc Blitzstein, who provided the narration for what had to be, for financial reasons, only a concert version rather than a fully staged performance. Conducting Weill's score in the orchestra pit was a professor of music at Brandeis and its first chairman of the School of Creative Arts, the thirty-four-year-old Leonard Bernstein. He had agreed to introduce and direct a campus arts festival, which happened to feature the dancing and choreography of a Black Mountain luminary, Merce Cunningham.⁷² By Bernstein thus helping ensure the durability of the German cultural legacy, he became an important conduit for the Americanization of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

To do so while McCarthyism raged entailed an element of bravado. The nation's political atmosphere, Bernstein wrote to a Brandeis colleague, encouraged "caution" and "fear." Bertolt Brecht, then living in East Berlin, was determined to remain a stone-cold Stalinist. When the Festival of the Creative Arts transplanted his left-wing musical from the spirit of Weimar cabaret to a suburban campus, the audience was compelled to confront a savagely dramatic diagnosis of capitalism as a system that is indistinguishable from criminality, and free enterprise was equated with predatory freebooting. So heartless are the economic arrangements depicted in *The Threepenny Opera* that Mack the Knife

wonders: what is the robbing of a bank compared to the *founding* of a bank? The Brecht-Weill underworld puts a premium on treachery and on the betrayal of friendship and love.

*Leonard Bernstein, above, in rehearsal for The Threepenny Opera,
at the 1952 Brandeis Festival of Creative Arts.*

*Below, the performance with Lotte Lenya, standing left,
Broadway actor David Brooks, center, and Mark Blitzstein, seated right.
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

The Festival of the Arts showed the vestigial power of a brilliant but brittle culture that had been dancing two decades earlier

on the edge of an abyss. In a climate of renewed repression and conformism, Brandeis had shown itself secure enough to present a work of art that had drawn its inspiration from the Communist politics of Bertolt Brecht. In its scholarship and in its arts, a university had also contrived to breathe life into the endangered legacy of Weimar culture, a spirit that was inflected both with a vivid Jewishness and an edge of dissidence. Peter Gay may not have exaggerated in claiming that the exiles constituted “the greatest collection of transplanted intellect, talent, and scholarship the world has ever seen.”⁷³ Marginalized in their homelands, those scholars who escaped Nazism found a new institutional home that enlivened mind and spirit in the Boston area. Black Mountain College had been spared the suspicions of the right-wing anti-Communists in the 1950s and demonstrated sufficient independence to play its own decisive role in helping to make American civilization less provincial.

*Black Mountain College Historical Marker
at the intersection of U.S. 70 and W. College Street,
Black Mountain, North Carolina.*

(Photo by Mike Stroud, 2012, courtesy of the Historical Marker Database.)

The juxtaposition of these two institutions may shed special light on the failure of Black Mountain College to endure. It simply could not survive independent of an ecosystem that might sustain a radical educational experiment in the arts. The institution was simply not indigenous to North Carolina, and it lacked the means to form a national constituency. Brandeis University managed to last because of the willingness and resources of a nationwide Jewish community that felt responsibility for a non-sectarian institution that seemed dedicated to ideals of both learning and social justice. Faculty members at Black Mountain prized their autonomy—too deeply, as it turned out, and ultimately no one wanted to throw them life preservers. Creativity became too hard to cultivate when the books did not balance. Built in the shadow of fabled universities, Brandeis had no alternative except to try to honor conventional criteria of scholarship and academic excellence, and did so under the auspices of traditional university governance, with a board of trustees composed mostly of businesspeople. Like Black Mountain, Brandeis was “different, really different.” But it also emulated the standards of liberal arts education enough to persist.

NOTES

In writing this essay, I am grateful for help from Donald Altschiller, Wendy Fergusson, Herbert S. Lewis, Maggie McNeely, Silvan S. Schweber, Sarah Shoemaker, and Jocelyn K. Wilk. The incisive criticism of Daniel Horowitz is also deeply appreciated, as are the comments of two anonymous readers of an earlier draft. But especially heartfelt thanks are extended to Leonard Rogoff, for his crucial help with research and for his persistent encouragement of this project. As the leading historian of North Carolina Jewry, a former president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, and parent of a Brandeis alumna, he is singularly qualified to have enhanced the formulation of this essay.

¹ Herbert Leibowitz, “Like a Who’s Who of the Avant Garde,” *New York Times Book Review*, October 29, 1972, 38; Lawrence Veysey, “On American Educational History,” *Harvard Educational Review* 43 (May 1973): 259, 260.

² Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968), xiv.

³ Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Garden City, NY, 1973), 180, 293–294, 333; Mark Lindley, “Erwin Bodky (1896–1958), a Prussian in Boston,” 2010 *Jahrbuch of the Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung* (Berlin, 2011), accessed March 26, 2013, http://www.SIM.spk-berlin.de/publikationen_427.html.

⁴ Burton M. Wasserman, “Josef Albers: His American Years,” *Art Education* 19 (October 1966): 11; Michael Rush, ed., “Introduction,” *The Rose Art Museum at Brandeis* (New York, 2009), 13.

⁵ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 34.

⁶ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 42; Christopher Benfey, *Red Brick, Black Mountain, White Clay: Reflections on Art, Family, and Survival* (New York, 2012), 126.

⁷ Quoted in Benfey, *Red Brick*, 123.

⁸ Benfey, *Red Brick*, 79, 124, 128; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 43; Mary Emma Harris, “Black Mountain College and its Cosmopolitan Faculty,” in *They Fled Hitler’s Germany and Found Refuge in North Carolina*, ed. Henry A. Landsberger and Christoph E. Schweitzer (Chapel Hill, 1996), 117–121; William H. Jordy, “The Aftermath of the Bauhaus in America: Gropius, Mies, and Breuer,” in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 507.

⁹ Benfey, *Red Brick*, 13, 137; Sam Hunter, ed., “Introduction,” *Josef Albers: Paintings and Graphics, 1917–1970* (Princeton, 1971), 5; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 58, 59.

¹⁰ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 89–90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172–173.

¹² Arnold Schoenberg to Frederick R. Mangold, May 17, 1939, and Heinrich Jalowetz to John Evarts, May 5, 1939, series III, box 3, folder “Heinrich Jalowetz,” Black Mountain College Papers, Department of Cultural Resources, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh (hereafter cited as BMC Papers).

¹³ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 173, 287.

¹⁴ Wendy L. Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual: Jewish Refugees and Homosexuals at Black Mountain College, NC, 1933–1956,” (master’s thesis, Brandeis University, 2007), 30–33; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 156, 229; Bertolt Brecht, “To Posterity,” in *Selected Poems*, trans. H. R. Hays (New York, 1959), 177.

¹⁵ Memorandum by Fritz Moellenhoff, June 14, 1938, series III, box 6, folder “Erwin Straus,” BMC Papers; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 179.

¹⁶ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 276; Sheri Bernstein, “Purism and Pragmatism,” in *Exiles+Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York, 1997), 259.

¹⁷ Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual,” 40.

¹⁸ Alfred Kazin to Albert W. Levi, April 13, 1948; Hannah Arendt to Levi, April 12, 1948, series III, box 6, folder “Isaac Rosenfeld,” BMC Papers; Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual,” 22; Steven J. Zipperstein, *Rosenfeld’s Lives: Fame, Oblivion, and the Furies of Writing* (New Haven, 2009), 2.

¹⁹ Frederick R. Mangold to Stephen Duggan, n.d. [1939], series II, box 5, folder "Committee in Aid of Refugee Scholars from Spain," BMC Papers.

²⁰ Karl Shapiro, *Collected Poems, 1940–1978* (New York, 1978), 10; Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900–1970* (Westport, CT, 1979); Dan Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale* (New Haven, 1985); Nitzza Rosovsky, *The Jewish Experience at Harvard and Radcliffe* (Cambridge, MA, 1986); Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston, 2005); Eunice G. Pollack, ed., *Antisemitism on Campus: Past and Present* (Boston, 2011).

²¹ Quoted in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York, 1988), 172–173.

²² Theodore Dreier to Fred Mangold, July 6, 1939, series III, box 2, folder "Theodore Dreier," BMC Papers, quoted in Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 58.

²³ Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 14; Harris, "Black Mountain College," in *They Fled Hitler's Germany*, 121; Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 250.

²⁴ Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 25.

²⁵ Quoted in Tibor Frank, "Organized Rescue Operations in Europe and the United States, 1933–1945," in *In Defence of Learning: The Plight, Persecution, and Placement of Academic Refugees, 1933–1980s*, ed. Shula Marks, Paul Weindling, and Laura Wintour (Oxford, 2011), 144, 145.

²⁶ Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 64–65; Memorandum to the Board of Fellows, July 6, 1938, series II, box 2, file "Appointments, Faculty" (1938), BMC Papers; Monica Mercado, University of Chicago archives, e-mail to author, August 29, 2012.

²⁷ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 14, 230–232.

²⁸ Bernstein, "Purism and Pragmatism," in *Exiles+Emigrés*, 254; Robert Wunsch to Anna Moellenhoff, July 27, 1938; Memorandum to the Board of Fellows, July 6, 1938, series II, box 2, file "Appointments, Faculty" (1938), BMC Papers.

²⁹ Leonard Silk, *The Economists* (New York, 1976), 14–15; Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University* (New York, 2001), 81–82.

³⁰ Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 59.

³¹ Quoted in Benfey, *Red Brick*, 182; Rogoff, *Down Home*, 250; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 67–69.

³² Christoph E. Schweitzer, "Ernst Moritz Manasse: A Black College Welcomes a Refugee," in *They Fled Hitler's Germany*, 48; Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar, FL, 1993), 66–69.

³³ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 175, 179, 183.

³⁴ Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 182; Lewis S. Feuer, "The Stages in the Social History of Jewish Professors in American Colleges and Universities," *American Jewish History* 71 (June 1982): 443, 445, 447.

³⁵ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 179, 180, 183, 186.

³⁶ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 213–218.

³⁷ *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, “Violence,” ed. Amy Louise Wood (Chapel Hill, 2011); *The Encyclopedia of New England*, ed. Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters (New Haven, 2005).

³⁸ Alfred Kazin, *New York Jew* (New York, 1978), 105; David Cunningham, “Truth, Reconciliation, and the Ku Klux Klan,” *Southern Cultures* 14 (Fall 2008): 70.

³⁹ Gabrielle Birkner, “Stanton, First Black Female Rabbi, Will Leave Her N. C. Congregation,” *Forward*, January 21, 2011, 6.

⁴⁰ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 74, 315; Rogoff, *Down Home*, 250; Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual,” 3, 59; Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (New York, 2009), 53.

⁴¹ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 459 n.50; Margret Kentgens-Craig, “The Arts: Justus Bier, Second Director of the North Carolina Museum of Art,” in *They Fled Hitler’s Germany*, 91, 93.

⁴² Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller, 1915–1962* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 185–186, 188.

⁴³ Quoted in Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 190–192.

⁴⁴ Leonard Rogoff e-mail to author, March 10, 2013.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 227; Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930–41*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1971), 98–99.

⁴⁶ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 35.

⁴⁷ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 173, 317, 391.

⁴⁸ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 420, 423, 426; Harris, “Black Mountain College,” in *They Fled Hitler’s Germany*, 116.

⁴⁹ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 572.

⁵⁰ Kazin, *New York Jew*, 107.

⁵¹ Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 330.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 225.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 317, 333; Wolfgang Saxon, “Nathan Rosen, 86, of Israel; Physicist Worked with Einstein,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1995; Rogoff, *Down Home*, 250, 260; Paul Halpern, “Peter Bergmann: The Education of a Physicist,” *Physics in Perspective* 7 (2005): 390–391, 396, 398–399.

⁵⁴ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, xi, 101, 163, 326, 344, 387, 410, 423, 430, 431.

⁵⁵ Susan Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning: A Picture History of the First Four Decades of Brandeis University* (Waltham, MA, 1988), 4, 6; Jamie Sayen, *Einstein in America: The Scientist’s Conscience in the Age of Hitler and Hiroshima* (New York, 1985), 240; Israel Goldstein, *Brandeis University: Chapter of Its Founding* (New York, 1951), 4.

⁵⁶ Richard M. Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts, 1945–1970* (New York, 1992), 185–188; Arthur H. Reis, Jr., “The Founding,” *Brandeis Review* 19 (Fall–Winter, 1998): 42; Abram L. Sachar, *A Host at Last* (Boston, 1976), 20.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 74.

⁵⁸ Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age*, 190–192.

⁵⁹ Leonard W. Levy to Ricardo Morant, March 18, 1999, copy in author's possession.

⁶⁰ Freeland, *Academia's Golden Age*, 190.

⁶¹ Susanne Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900–1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation* (New Haven, 1991), 132.

⁶² Levy to Morant, March 18, 1999.

⁶³ Louis Kronenberger, *No Whippings, No Gold Watches: The Saga of a Writer and His Jobs* (Boston, 1970), 199–202, 225–26, 241; Belle Dorfman Jurkowitz, *Strictly by the Book: The History of the Brandeis University National Women's Committee* (Waltham, MA, 1998), 3, 7; Sachar, *A Host at Last*, 167, 169.

⁶⁴ Quoted in "A Man Who Believed in Mankind," *Time*, July 11, 1983, 71.

⁶⁵ "Brandeis University Faculty, 1948–1955 (Faculty Hiring, 1944–1954)," in George Alpert Collection, box 2, Board of Trustees Robert D. Farber University Archives, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; "One-Dimensional Philosopher," *Time*, March 22, 1968, 38.

⁶⁶ Quoted in "Pontiff Assails Eroticism Again," *New York Times*, October 2, 1969, 23; "Pack Some Good Books," *Time*, November 23, 1992, 15.

⁶⁷ "341 Enter 10th Frosh Class: Curriculum, Faculty Increased," *Justice*, September 18, 1957, 1.

⁶⁸ "Brandeis University: New Jewish-Founded School in Massachusetts Preaches and Practices Democracy," *Ebony*, February 1952, 59; Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 133.

⁶⁹ "Brandeis University," *Ebony*, 59–63.

⁷⁰ Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 48; Sachar, *A Host at Last*, 286.

⁷¹ Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, 2007), 102, 111, 113.

⁷² John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover, NH, 2003), 101, 186; Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 88–89; Sachar, *A Host at Last*, 62.

⁷³ Gay, *Weimar Culture*, xiv.