



# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry

### Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



## Dr. Samuel Milton Nabrit

(February 21, 1905 - December 30, 2003)

“Marine Biologist/ First African American  
on the Atomic Energy Commission”



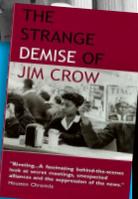
S. Milton Nabrit 1928-31, 1934, 1936

**Samuel Milton Nabrit** was born in Macon, Georgia, on February 21, 1905. Samuel's father was a Baptist Minister, and his mother was a school teacher. He was valedictorian of his high school class and after graduating from Morehouse College with a bachelor's degree in Science in 1925, he began teaching at Morehouse. He married in 1927. While teaching, Samuel continued his education, earning a master's degree from the University of Chicago. Morehouse College president John Hope, a Brown alumnus, encouraged Samuel to apply to Brown's doctoral program in biology. Samuel's application was initially denied due to concerns about racial tensions. President Hope made a call to Brown President William Faunce on Samuel's behalf and he was admitted. Samuel completed his PhD from Brown University - the first black person to earn a PhD in Biology. He was a member of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity.



Samuel was vital to the establishment of the National Institute of Science (NIS), a non-profit professional organization supporting science education and research at historically Black colleges and universities, in 1943. Samuel continued teaching at Morehouse and later at Atlanta University as head of the Biology department and dean of the graduate school from 1932 to 1947. He was appointed dean of the graduate school of arts and sciences of Atlanta University in 1947, where he served as dean for eight years. Samuel traveled to the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, conducting research and studying the regeneration of fish tail fins. In 1950, Dr. Nabrit was a research fellow at the University of Brussels in Belgium. The scientific papers Nabrit published during this period, remained influential in the field for decades.

In 1955, Samuel became president of Texas Southern University (TSU). Under his eleven-year leadership, TSU more than tripled the number of doctor of philosophy degree holders on the faculty, increased the university's enrollment by 50 percent, increased graduation rates, and balanced the budget. While there, he acted on behalf of his students, supporting their protests and negotiating with public officials during the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. Samuel ensured that no TSU student would be expelled from school for participating in protests or demonstrations. Samuel's brother, James Nabrit, was a civil rights attorney and was one of the three lawyers who successfully argued the Brown v. Board of Education case before the Supreme Court in 1954. Samuel Nabrit's role in the desegregation of Houston was later portrayed in the 1998 documentary film "The Strange Demise of Jim Crow: How Houston Desegregated Its Public Accommodations, 1959-1963" by Thomas Cole.



Around the same time, Samuel served on the National Science Board, appointed by President Eisenhower. He was later appointed as special ambassador to Niger, by President John. F. Kennedy. In 1966, Samuel Milton Nabrit became the first black person appointed to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Shortly after leaving TSU, Samuel became the first black member of the board of trustees of Brown University in 1967.

Samuel served as executive director of the Southern Fellowship Fund in Atlanta from 1967 until his retirement in 1981. He held numerous professional memberships, including the American Society of Zoologists, National Association for Research in Science Teaching, Phi Beta Kappa, and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. Texas Southern University named their science center in his honor. Brown University established the Nabrit Fellowship for minority graduate students in his honor in 1985. Samuel's wife, Constance Croker, preceded him in death and the couple had no children. Dr. Samuel Milton Nabrit died on December 30, 2003, in Atlanta. He was 98 years old. He is buried in Westview Cemetery in Atlanta.

