

## LUCIUS P. GREGG, JR.

b. 1933, BS 1955 US Naval Academy, SM 1961 (aeronautics and astronautics) MIT; served in the US Air Force, 1955-1965; associate dean of science and director of research coordination, Northwestern University, 1965-1969; program officer, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 1969-1972; vice president, First National Bank of Chicago, 1972-1979; corporate vice president for strategic planning, Bristol-Myers Co., 1979-1983; vice president and director of national public relations and government relations, Citibank, 1983-1987; vice president for public relations, New York Daily News, 1987-1989; staff vice president for corporate communications, Hughes Electronics Corp., 1989-



When I look back, I now realize that I came to MIT at a time when the country as a whole was going through profound and unprecedented change. It is startling. We were entering a period that would change so much—from the balance of power in the world, down to even our lifestyles and attitudes. Over the past forty to fifty years, we have seen more change—in science and technology, in military power, and in social justice—than for any other comparable time in this nation's history, and maybe in all of history. Only today can we realize how fortunate we now are to have been a part of it.

I now realize that, when I was a graduate student, we were entering a period in which our efforts would result in America's undisputed leadership in both technology and military power. At the same time, the social agenda having to do with equality was being raised to a new, more painful and contentious level. My life symbolizes the convergence of all three.

I sit here today, a kid from Chicago's ghetto, because many Americans, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, decided that the way things were was not how they were going to be, and that we—MIT included—decided that we all deserved a better deal. I came out of the Naval Academy in 1955. I was the fourth black to graduate, but the first to graduate with what they called "distinction," in the top ten percent. I ranked high enough that I was able to choose the Air Force. Then, when I ranked pretty high in terms of pilot training, I was able to pick the Military Air Command, and after a year and a half, they promoted me to aircraft commander.

Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Lucius P. Gregg, Jr., in Los Angeles, California, March 1997.

Once again, I was the only black in that group. I had my own crew at the age of twenty-five. The Air Force was letting their first group of first lieutenants fly with the rank of aircraft commander. Prior to that, you had to wait until you were much older before they let you have your own crew to fly military families and government officials back and forth to Europe. I did that for three years, flying once a week to Europe.

During one of these trips I remember—on October 5, 1957—I was waiting that morning in the hotel lobby in Paris with my crew to bring a return flight of passengers back to the States. I picked up the Paris newspaper as a way of staying fluent in French. The headline read, "Russians Launch Sputnik, U.S. Sends Troops to Little Rock." A chilling moment. America's challenges both internally and externally were then raised to new levels.



I then applied to the Air Force to go to graduate school. After reviewing my undergraduate records, they said, "Okay, you have three choices—Illinois, MIT, or the Air Force Institute of Technology." I opted for MIT, for the graduate program in aeronautics and astronautics, and graduated in 1961. There was so much going on then in science and technology, in addition to the national security concerns of the Cold War. That certainly kept us at MIT focused.

I would say that my coming out of MIT stood as a symbol to some of the other not-so-pioneering technical institutions. The symbolism said, "Wait a minute. If guys like Lu Gregg and others are coming out of MIT, what's our problem?" That's why I think that I was able to go to places like Northwestern, where I was associate dean of sciences. I was able to sit in their faculty meetings and the deans' meetings, and speak. Having the MIT credentials gave me an element of credence and credibility. I hope MIT does not underestimate the role that it played in that early period.

I recall a program on public television last year on the life of A. Philip Randolph, who preceded Martin Luther King. What it talked about was his role from the 1940s and '50s into the '60s. The A. Philip Randolph story has also caused me to look back and realize that, when I was at the Naval Academy and MIT, it was really the beginning of very profound changes in our society. On the military side, there was the whole notion of our national security. On the technology side, there was this little thing called an electron. We started to find out all the things that we could do with it, and what it could mean in terms of benefits.

During the same time, A. Philip Randolph was beginning to meet with President Truman and, later, President Eisenhower. It was interesting to listen to that one-hour PBS story on Randolph's life. As they laid out the chronology, I realized that what I was seeing and feeling was a whole movement taking place in terms of civil rights. We were feeling it. Even though I came up within the scientific and the military arena, you're still aware of all the struggle and soul searching that's going on outside of science, in the realms of the nation's social policy and civil rights. It does really affect your day-to-day activities. It, too, is a part of your daily life.

You couldn't live in Boston, Washington, or elsewhere without feeling it. All these things were

taking place at the same time. In the 1950s, when I was in the Naval Academy, the Washington train station had a "colored" restroom. One of my classmates was selected as an All-American football player from the Naval Academy, but I did not go when Navy played in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans in 1953. The Naval Academy got special permission that if I wanted to go to New Orleans when Navy played in the Sugar Bowl, I could sit with the midshipmen and I would not have to come out of that group and sit separately where the blacks were sitting in the end zone.

In Washington, the whole Baltimore-Washington expressway was built by President Kennedy in part because the African diplomats traveling back and forth from the UN to Washington couldn't stop on U.S. Route 40 and buy a hot dog or use the restroom. Every time they did, they were told they had to go to some outhouse someplace. That created an international incident and was one of the things that motivated the federal government to build that expressway, so your travels could bypass that whole area.

Because of changes in the scientific and military communities, they were beginning to promote minorities and create role models at the same time that civil rights activists were raising questions more vocally outside. To some extent, some of the questions they were raising externally kept us focused internally and made us a little more dedicated so as not to fail. I see now that we were opening doors so that others could follow us.

Every day presented different opportunities, challenges, and threats. Once I was called to fly the Kennedy White House staff from Palm Beach to Martha's Vineyard. I'll never forget the time I was Strom Thurmond's personal pilot on a VIP flight out of Andrews Air Force Base, flying him to Columbia, South Carolina, on July 3, 1963. He thanked me when he got on and when he got off. But the next day he blasted the civil rights movement and switched to being a Republican. Nor will I forget the time, while driving to Palm Beach Air Force Base, that I was stopped on the highway outside of Ft. Pierce, Florida, handcuffed, put in a patrol car with a shotgun to my head, and put in a lineup at the police station because I looked like the guy who had robbed a store and kidnapped the white clerk.

So much change was going on. None of us thought at that time that the changes were going

to be so quick in coming. Even considering the role of the electron itself as an element of matter, no one envisioned what we were beginning to wrestle with, what you could do with this thing called an electron. Science was getting into the most minute parts of matter. Every day brought new discoveries, but I suspect that few realized that this was part of a technological revolution and that we would look back thirty or forty years later and say, "Wow, I was a part of that!" and look at the amount of change.

I remember sitting in the graduate course at MIT. First, there were few textbooks. The knowledge was changing so rapidly that the purple copying machine outputs were the lecture notes of the class. One time they asked one professor, "Each year on the exam you keep asking the same questions. Aren't you afraid that the students are going to cheat when they write the answers?" He said, "No, because the answers keep changing."

And the second thing is, there were twenty-five of us military officers there who had been sent to MIT to get our graduate degree. Sitting beside me was Buzz Aldrin, who would later become the second astronaut to step on the moon. This was a course on automatic control of aerospace missiles. The professor looked up at the clock and said, "Well, I've finished what I'm going to cover today but it's too early to let you go this soon. I have to keep you at least another five or ten minutes. I don't want to start the next subject. I'm going to hold that until next time. Let me just spend some time telling you about this new form of computing that we're doing. It's called 'digital.'" We reached for our notes and we started looking up to see how to spell it. This was 1960. And he said, "It's like a combination of zeros and ones." I remember in my notes drawing the line. But we had no idea that we were on the threshold of something that was so profound, that was the beginning of the digital revolution that has changed the world.

We were in this live-or-die situation against Russia. We didn't know at any moment what would happen. When we would take off out of New Jersey and fly to Europe, one of the first things that the military had us doing was looking down to report Russian submarines that were sitting in the Atlantic off the United States. This was in the late 1950s. It was at the beginning of the ballistic missile programs and the hydrogen bomb. The technology revolution was beginning to

accelerate, but we had no idea that it was going to end up this way. There was the national security thing, which really had to do with the military.

Then the third item was, of course, the sociopolitical atmosphere—how would this country deal with this notion of social justice? All three were happening at this time, and we were trying to keep some degree of balance with all of them.

Then I went to Washington. The John Glenn flight was approaching. I remember a guy from Cleveland, Ohio, coming to the Office of Scientific Research (OSR). He looked like some sort of garage-type inventor. He came to the reception desk and he had to talk to somebody to stop the John Glenn flight, because he was convinced that John Glenn was going to kill himself. At that time, the uncertainties in our calculations were just large enough that we really weren't a hundred percent sure. There was an element of risk in all that stuff that we were doing. So since I was the youngest ranking scientist in the office, I was the one who was told to go to the reception room and meet with this guy.

At the time, people were pretty fanatical about their particular theories. There was an editor of one of the physics journals in New York, who kept turning down one guy's article that he was proposing for them to publish. The third time they turned it down he walked into the editor's office and shot him. So we knew, when we were talking to people like that, that there was a degree of sensitivity there. My boss sent me out there. The older guys stayed back in the office. I went out to the reception area and I had to sit and listen to this guy and talk to him. We went into the conference room. And sure enough, like a lot of these scenes, there's a little glimmer of truth in what he's saying. The rest of it may not make sense, but there's a little element of truth in it. The question was how to turn him around and get him to go back to Cleveland and understand that John Glenn's life wasn't at stake. We were not going to pick up the phone and call Cape Kennedy and ask them to stop the flight, which was what he wanted me to do.

While at OSR, I was the project scientist with thirty contracts in the area of basic research. Of the thirty scientists, I would say about twenty of them were in the university community and about ten of them were in industry. We were doing very fundamental research in the areas of aerospace engineering, aeronautic and astronautic. Right after

graduation, I inherited these thirty contracts. Two of them were run by MIT professors who had taught me. I didn't go back and check to see what grade they gave me and see how I was going to treat them in terms of their funding, you know, or whether I was going to recommend that their contract be extended. But that was the level of intensity we were in. I think I remember one of the professors saying, "One of the reasons I'm going to be hard on you guys is because you guys, in about another year or so, are going to be sitting in judgment on my life. So I'm going to make sure that you understand what it is that we're working on."

*Those who come after you owe you a lot. It was a small number of you and that says a lot about you. But it also says, from what I've gathered from several of you, something about the institution itself, too. I would like to know more about where you got all that from. This was not typical at this point, so where did you grow up to get that motivation and opportunity?*

For a number of us, I think the external environment gave us the support structure that kept us dedicated, even when we wanted to throw our hands up in the air.

In my senior year in high school, I applied to go to the University of Illinois at Urbana to major in physics. My high school counselor said, "No, you want to be a teacher. You don't want to get into science." But what happened was, the Korean War started and they began drafting seventeen-year-olds. Don't ask me why, but in high school—my last year—I joined the Marine Corps reserve unit. Any time you wore a uniform in the black community in 1949 or '50, you had no trouble getting dates. That meant a lot, you know. Then they activated our Marine Corps reserve unit when I was getting ready to go off to the University of Illinois.

My mother didn't tell me how nervous she was about that, but I ended up spending one year in the Marine Corps getting ready for Korea. During that time, I was on the bowling team and there was this black guy who was the chaplain's assistant at Barstow, California, outside of Los Angeles. I'm seventeen years old and he said to me, "You ought to try for the Naval Academy." By chance I happened to mention this to my mother in one of my letters. She took that letter and mentioned it to my uncle, who was a Democratic precinct captain, who then went to Congressman

Dawson. Dawson had an opening and said, "Sure, I'll recommend him. Get me a recommendation from his high school."

So sixty days after writing that letter to my mom, I looked up and I had military orders from the Pentagon that said, "You're to report immediately to the Naval Academy Prep School at Newport, Rhode Island, to take the test for admission to the Naval Academy." I got there just thirty days before the test. They didn't have time to put me into a nine-month preparatory program to get me prepared to take the test. I managed to pass the test in all of the categories and pass the physical, and I got admitted to the Naval Academy.

As I was going from California to Newport, Rhode Island, the train stopped in Chicago. Everybody went by train in 1949. My high school principal met me at the station. She had the entire ROTC there and the Chicago newspaper. They took my picture as I was transferring from the train that came in from California and getting on the train that was heading on into New England. My picture was in one of the leading Chicago daily newspapers the next day. They made a big thing out of it; Dawson made a big thing out of it. I was his first. He had been in Congress for twenty years and I was the first black he had appointed. He had been giving his appointments to the football coach. No way I could go back to Chicago if I failed. I was the first black to be appointed from there to the Naval Academy.

While I was at the Naval Academy, the first year I was in the bottom fourth of the class. But when I graduated, my total cumulative grade point average put me in the top ten percent. In my third year, I got the highest mark on the electrical engineering exam of any of the thousand midshipmen in the class. I had been president of the honor society in my high school, but it was an underserved high school. I lapped up everything they offered, but still, when it was time to go from there to my freshman year at the Naval Academy, I was weak in terms of the tools that they had prepared me with. Yet the question is—what kept me struggling there in that first year, so that by the time I finally caught on to all of the tricks of the trade in science and math, I was able to end up cumulatively at the top?

When I went back to my fortieth reunion at the Naval Academy in 1995, it put this whole thing in perspective. Coming out of World War II, the Navy ended up with ships without technically

trained officers to lead and command the ships. They had to staff up the Naval Academy because many of the officers didn't have the technical backgrounds that they needed in order to operate these floating platforms that were getting more and more sophisticated in terms of electronics and other technologies. That's when the Naval Academy began to play a very important role in terms of the leadership in the Navy.

I only say that because the Naval Academy was an environment where you were respected, you were revered, you were held in high esteem. It kept you going, almost to the point where you were worried about disappointing yourself. But you didn't want to disappoint others. My mother, even when she had trouble getting me to understand right from wrong, would say, "Don't embarrass me, son." It ranged from "Don't have any holes in your socks" to "Please keep good grades in school." That's all she ever said, "Don't embarrass me, son, don't embarrass me." I had this feeling that if I didn't hang in at school, I was going to embarrass her. That probably meant more to me than anything else.

I kept a newspaper article that raised the question of whether kids are dropping out of school or whether the parents are the ones who are dropping out. I still believe that parental pressure has a role to play. And I think that at that time the voices of the adults made it seem like what we were doing as young people coming along was so important that we worried as much about not embarrassing them as anything else. Even if they didn't know what we were going through at the time, they made it seem like a big deal that was important to them—and to us.

My father was only with us until I was seven, so my mother raised us. I had an older sister and a younger sister and I was in the middle, in a span of just three or four years. I didn't have that kind of father role in the house, but I remember every time I went to the barber shop, the barber would always say, "How are you doing in school?" He asked me in such a deep voice, like James Earl Jones. Here I was, twelve or thirteen years old. Just the mere question made me shudder. In the next chair he would be giving some guy a shave with one of those open razors. I never thought of lying to him. I would say, "Fine, fine. I'm doing okay." And he would say, "All right, that's all I want to know." He'd ask me that every time I went in there.

But that was a kind of external motivator. I don't think he was conscious of it. You didn't look at these things explicitly. All these little things adding up created a kind of a thing that said, "You've got to keep focused. There are consequences to not keeping focused, and you don't want to embarrass these people."

That's a long answer to, where did it come from? Even if you were poor, your parents didn't want you to believe that you were poor, and so you had this feeling that things were better than they really were. I think the same thing was true in terms of staying focused as a kid coming along. You've got to have it inside, but you may not have the motivation to bring whatever that internal thing is to bear. So maybe it's a combination of having been blessed with having it inside, but also having that external support system that allows you to keep focused.

*You have had tremendously broad experiences that a lot of blacks have never had. You've been places that so many of us have not been. You've seen decisions being made. You've been a part of making key decisions and seeing how things operate in America and in the world. How would you describe the most critical situations that you've had to face and overcome, and what helped you deal with them? All of us at some point get to these points—these critical situations—that we have to face or overcome. They're hurdles or they're bottlenecks or critical points in our careers. When you look back on yours, they were very critical, even if you didn't realize they were at the time. Somehow or another you dealt with them. I think you've talked a little bit about some of them, but I wanted to pinpoint them—particularly given where you are now, which is not just an average location.*

Let me reflect on two thoughts, one being a positive opportunity and one being a setback. On the positive side, just the frame of mind of being very attentive to the way things happen around you is important. It could be the way someone makes their rather superb presentation and seems to come out with a successful outcome. What are the tricks of the trade or a particular strategy that someone else uses? It's that informal learning process. If you're fortunate enough to be in the room when important things happen, can you walk out of that room bringing with you the things that will sharpen your own instincts, so that if you find yourself in a situation where you then have to make your own decision, you've learned from it?

I'm reminded of Les Brown and his stories of growing up poor in Miami, being allowed to be the messenger to go out to get lunch and bring it in to the staff at the radio station. When he'd bring in the lunch, he'd always stay for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, until the staff looked around and got uncomfortable from him being there. But he would stand there and he would watch them operate. Each time he stayed in the control room a little bit longer and a little bit longer and a little bit longer. This one famous announcer, a white guy in Miami, was having a drinking problem. Les Brown used that to strike up a friendship with the owner of the radio station. One day the guy couldn't show up, and the owner somehow unexpectedly out of the blue called Les Brown and said, "Do you know how to do what he does?" And Les Brown said, "I sure do."

I too took advantage of opportunities. You got accustomed to the fact that you'd end up in meetings of a thousand people and you'd be the only black person in the room. It was just one of those things. But, of course, having come through the Naval Academy at that time, you knew what it was about. You kept focused and I guess, when I look back, we made a little bit of a mark that made it a lot easier for others.

In the '60s, I was asked to be one of the founding board members that created the Fermi National Accelerator Lab in Illinois, where I began to represent Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Illinois in a lot of activities with the National Academy of Sciences. I also served on their Commission on Human Resources and chaired their Committee on Minorities in Science. And I served as vice chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

I remember in 1970 I got a call from the Secretary of the Navy to come and be on the Naval Academy board. That year was a very interesting time for me. I went on the academic board of the Naval Academy, I went on the visiting committee at MIT in the area of aeronautics and astronautics, and I went on the visiting committee at Harvard in physics. Once or twice a year we would come and review the department's program, and then meet with the dean and comment about what we thought about the strengths and weaknesses of the undergraduate and the graduate programs, and the faculty research. I learned a lot.

I was young and I had been involved in a lot, but there were Nobel laureates sitting on both sides of me, so I had to test out expressing my opinion in that kind of environment. But I began to develop an appreciation for how, at the highest levels of technology policy, you began to look at the role of technology.

To be on the visiting committee at Harvard in physics and at MIT in aeronautics and astronautics was quite something. When you are exposed to a lot of wisdom, you can pick it up. Even in your mid-twenties, in your late twenties, in your early thirties, you find yourself in that situation—to just be absorbing all the things that go on. It's not the textbook, it's how people influence each other and what works and what doesn't work. It's almost like lessons learned. Even when you are not a participant, when you're just a fly on the wall to watch it happen, these things can help guide you.

I remember, after MIT, I sat in an office in Washington with a guy named Colonel Boreske. He had gotten two promotions in the Air Force in eighteen months. His desk and my desk were in the same office. I was a young lieutenant and I was his deputy. I asked him one day, "How did you get promoted?" He said, "You know, in every organization, always look out for the one thing that would make a significant difference and that people just seem to be a little reluctant to take on. You can't devote a hundred percent of your time to that because everybody's got to do the blocking and tackling of administration. But always have a little three-by-five card file in your drawer. Every now and then, just pull them out and just work on them. There are some things that could make a significant difference. Just work on it maybe half an hour a day. Then all of a sudden, if it looks like it's something that you can pull together, go for it. That way you will differentiate your own part, your own contribution, so much so that all of a sudden, the next time they have a meeting, they can't have the meeting without you because you have your arms around a certain concept, a certain body of information that they can't go on without you." He also said to always be very careful of only being the "me-too" person of the team, because if they decide to have a reduction in staff and there are ten of you—and all ten of you are skilled in the same thing—how do you make sure that you're not axed when they decide

to cut the force by twenty percent or thirty percent? There's a value you bring to the team that no one else does.

I think of it as a minority, but I think I would say the same thing for a lot of the women who are working their way into the corporate world. You've got to focus on what it is about you that makes you different and better. What is the knowledge base that you bring to whether our strategy wins or loses? That means that the next time they have a meeting, they can't have the meeting without you. Otherwise, they're going without your information.

That was Boreske's advice to me in terms of opportunity. When I find myself in a meeting and I'm sitting there and I'm watching what's going on and I'm taking notes, I'm looking as much at the interpersonal stuff—what makes for how a team works and what the outcomes are and who wins and who loses in terms of the team activities—as much as at the substance or the content. In a real sense, interpersonal stuff can have as much of a bearing on where you end up in life as anything else. The technical aspects are necessary, but you need to add to that the interpersonal wherewithal. You can have two points of view. Each point of view can be equally valid, and one way or the other, one point of view is going to prevail. But what is it that makes that one point of view prevail? And the question is, can I package my point of view in such a way that my point of view more often than not is going to prevail? It's either the good part of human behavior or maybe the frailty of human behavior, but it's the reality.

At Hughes, we teach this to our managers. We have a training program for our top executives in how to communicate with the press. And by and large, a lot of the principles and the little tricks of the trade in dealing with significant reporters in major publications—*Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Business Week*, and so forth—relate to the fact that it's an interpersonal relationship. How do you work it? The basic content of your message is one thing. It's how you shape it and how you can make the difference, and it's persuasion. The reporter can have a point of view and you can have a point of view, and the question is—what point of view ends up in the story? It's a contest. It's just a fact of life and you have to step up to it.

On the negative side, if you start off in life and one good thing happens to you and then

another good thing happens to you and another good thing happens to you, what you have to worry about is—how do you handle your first failure? I learned a long time before I had my first failure that the habits of successful people are very hard to break, even when the environment changes. But the question is, how do you handle your first setback? It can be pretty difficult. I would say in terms of a critical moment, it's encountering that first setback. You've got your heart set on a certain job and you don't end up getting selected for that job, or you think that you should be the one getting promoted and your promotion goes to somebody else. The way I've compensated for that is, I've always had a Plan B. You never take off in an airplane to fly across the Atlantic without an alternate airport in case something happens at the destination that your flight plan takes you to. And you've got to have enough fuel to get there. We can go over the destination airport, we can circle for an hour or two, and we've still got enough fuel to get to the alternate.

I guess I would say that, when you reach the forks in the road and somebody's holding shut the gate that allows you to go take one particular fork that you've really got your heart set on, and that gate doesn't open, you've got to have enough fuel to get to the other one. Otherwise, what's the alternative? Do you self-destruct? Do you just wipe out everything that you've put into it so far? So I guess it's having that contingency plan. You kind of need it emotionally, and when you get the news that your preference didn't take place, you've got to mentally start making the shift real quick. You can't dwell on it and hang and grieve for a long period of time. You've just got to make that shift and keep going.

*How did you get started in communications?*

I was deeply involved in science and technology. I was at Northwestern. I realized that the public, and particularly school kids, were not aware of what the opportunities were. So what I used to do, when I was in the Office of Scientific Research and at Northwestern in my young days, was go off and talk to school kids about the opportunities in science and engineering. That started me. I would first go out, I would write these speeches, and I would give them.

One of the personal stories I have always remembered about Martin Luther King, Jr., is

interesting. When the struggle started in Montgomery and Rosa Parks was being publicized, the community was all upset and they were interested in starting the bus boycott. They went to one of the old ministers there and said, "We've got to do something." He said, "I'm too old, but there's a young guy who just came here from Boston. He's twenty-seven years old. Let's call him and see if he'll do something."

The first meeting at the church, the people are there and it's getting into the evening. It was after dinner and they were going to have their march. But before their march, they were waiting there for the minister to come out, take the pulpit, and say what it's all about before they were going to walk outside. They knew that the Ku Klux Klan people were across the street in their hoods.

There were about six or seven ministers sitting around this table in the back of the church—sort of like the minister's study—and at the end of it was this young black, Martin Luther King, Jr. The ministers saw that he had his pad of paper. He was doodling. They had asked him to speak and he had agreed to do it. He was there doodling and it didn't look like he was focused at all. One of the old-timers turned to him and said, "Reverend King, are you having trouble getting started with what you're going to say?" He said, "No, I'm trying to figure out how I want to end it."

I use that point when I work on speeches, even for the chairman here at Hughes Aircraft or Hughes Electronics. The first thing we have to decide is, where do we want to end up? There are nine different ways you can start this speech, but how do you want to end up? That's going to be the most important thing, and that was King's approach. Of course, the nation is better off because of it, because he had this way of saying, "How do I want to end up and what is the main point I want to make?" That was his approach. Of course, they just left him alone and he went ahead and kept doodling. Then he went out, stood before the congregation, and made one of his early stirring speeches. That was when he was first introduced in Montgomery.

Then, of course, I began to realize that many of our technical institutions and many of our technical industries are ill equipped to get the public aware of the value that they bring to whatever the quality of life is. I began to feel as though that was going to be their Achilles' heel. To some extent,

universities were like that. Now, I think, universities are better equipped and are more actively going out and making sure that their surrounding publics are more aware of the importance of what they bring.

The King approach has stood me in good stead even to this day. When the new chairman came to Hughes in 1993, I was the first person he wanted to meet, because he was getting ready to hold a news conference. We flew him in a corporate airplane under an assumed name. We went over the announcement that was going to take place two hours later. We had the satellites all set because we were going to broadcast the announcement by satellite into all of our plant facilities. I had worked out the arrangement to introduce him, to walk him into the auditorium, and the retiring chairman was then going to introduce him as the chairman coming in.

After he got on board and took charge, he began to work and make us more competitive. He came up with this new organization chart. What happened was that he came in and handed the personnel department people his version of the chart. He had drawn it out in pencil. They noticed where he placed Communications. When they saw where he had put Communications, they decided that he had probably made a mistake. They thought, "He ran out of paper and he couldn't put it over to the side, so let's give it back to him in two forms."

They actually put two sheets of paper in front of him. I'm hearing this from the guy who actually had to meet with him. He said, "We took your pencil sketch, Mr. Chairman. Here it is, but we noticed you had put Communications first and we thought maybe you'd want it over here on the side after Legal, Finance, Marketing, and Technology. We also did it and we put Communications over here on the side after finance and marketing and what have you." And the chairman said, "No, this is exactly the way I want it. When it comes to leadership, I want to send out a message as to the important role that Communications is going to have." The result was that he became regarded as an excellent communicator who was able to use Communications to really influence the direction and motivation of this company. There is a role for communications. It's a very, very influential field. It can be an asset. If you don't do it right, it can be a liability.



Thinking back, the one thing that they said to me when I came here was, “What we like about your background is that we can bring you into a technology-intensive company and, even though you’re on the communications/PR side, we look at your background and say that you understand us because you are an engineer.” So I can sit in meetings with Ph.D’s from Stanford, Caltech, Berkeley, UCLA, USC, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and MIT. And I say, “I hear what you’re saying, but I would like to recommend that instead of zig, we zag.” It’s that credibility. I probably haven’t touched a technical instrument in fifteen years, but it’s a prior association that gives you credibility. They at least listen to you. They give you the benefit of the doubt.

Anyhow, that leading place on the organizational chart didn’t exist when I came here. I think the fact that he put communication in the forefront on the organizational chart has caused a lot of people to think. It has certainly made the people behind me here walk a little taller. Now we have to live up to what’s expected. It’s a nice place to be.

*I have two more questions. One is really more related to something you talked about earlier, but I think it’s important in terms of trying to put this piece together for our young people. It’s in two parts. Based on your own experience, is there any advice you might offer to young blacks who are entering the kind of profession that you’re in? We’re talking about high school kids, we’re talking about freshmen whom I counsel a lot and whom other people counsel, particularly before getting to college. There’s a message that I think we need to try to keep giving back. In talking to someone as important as you in this organization about the trailblazing things that you’ve done, what advice would you give to young blacks who may perhaps look in your direction and go down that path?*

There’s a fashionable term, “Pursue your dream.” But I think that’s a little bit too idealistic. There are certain needs in society that have to be met, and that creates a demand. As we come from childhood right up to being young adults, there’s kind of a balance sheet of assets and liabilities, personal strengths and weaknesses. If we are aware of what our strengths are and the kinds of things in life that we seem to comprehend a little better than others, those are probably little messages that are being sent to us, to the effect that we may have been

blessed with a certain set of attributes that steer us in one direction as opposed to another.

I think what we then have to do is to decide, how do those fit in the overall canvas and in the overall fabric of where the needs are? If you find a fit, go for it. If you develop a certain set of skills in a certain direction, as you get through the early period of life, you can then transition into much broader things. I don’t know whether it’s in health care or it’s in science and technology or if it’s on the creative side, whatever, but the brain is not all balanced. Sometimes the left side of the brain is a little more adept than the right side. I would say that if you find something and you’re comfortable with that, that is where the fit is in terms of the things that seem to interest you most. There’s a reality check, and if the reality check says that there’s a need there, then go for it. I would caution, though—don’t be overly swayed by what the external forces are saying that you should do, unless that kind of meshes with what it is that you have.

When I used to go out to Northwestern and talk about opportunities in science, sometimes they’d send me into some of the wealthy high schools in the northern suburbs of Chicago as well as to the inner city. This is where Northwestern draws a lot of their college students. They’re going to have “career day,” and they want somebody from Northwestern to come out and talk about science and somebody else to come and talk about careers in the arts and so forth. They’re going to have their seniors attend. Sometimes there were hardly any minorities in the audience. What was very interesting is that quite often there would be young girls who would come up to me afterwards and say, “I like what you said about science and engineering. I want to go into it, but my father wants me to be a nurse.” I would say to them, “You have to respect your parents and so forth, but that’s not the track you want to go.”

So you have to listen to your inner voices, and if your inner voices are telling you that there are certain aspects of knowledge that seem to fit better with you, then those are the subject matters that you tend to gravitate toward. I guess academia still hasn’t told us whether interest and understanding are synonymous. Do you understand something better because you’re interested in it, or are you interested in it because you understand it? I don’t know. We won’t worry about that. A hundred years from now they’ll still be debating that

issue. But if interest and understanding seem to have the right chemistry, and there's a reality check on the outside, go for it. If the reality check says that there are only so many places for archaeology, we've got to be worried—particularly for minorities—because our reentry doors and opportunities are not as extensive as they are for the majority. That's the sad part about young kids who come out and spend an inordinate amount of time going down roads where there's no payoff. The reality check isn't there, or they're pursuing something more for fun and games.

I think we're still in a very serious civil rights struggle. I'd like for you and me to feel as though, somewhere along the line, the struggle has been won. But I doubt it. While there are still glimmers of hope, probably our kids are going to have to inherit the struggle. And, as a result, we probably don't have the luxury to go off and do so many of the esoteric things that the more financially secure parts of the society are able to do.

The war is still on, and I guess not everybody is born equal. If you happen to find out that either because of the genes of your mom and dad, or because of the nurturing you got as a kid growing up, you end up a little better off than everybody else, the term that I use to remind corporate America—it's a French term, and I think it's just as applicable to the young kids—is “noblesse oblige.” There is an obligation that comes with being blessed. Somehow you luck out and you've been given certain strengths that give you the potential to have a position of privilege in whatever setting of society that you're in. You don't have to walk with a Bible under your arm to realize that somehow that the overall community and nation are going to be better off if those who have those gifts also feel a sense of obligation to those who do not. There are young people coming along who have the capabilities. If we are indeed still in a struggle—and I think we are—all of the evidence points to the fact that we can't declare victory yet, for this society is still the role model for the rest of the world.

Let me say one final thing. When young people pursue their dream, they should keep in mind that many Americans—rich and poor, powerful and powerless—are still continuing to change things to the way they should be. Therefore, more and more opportunities they will encounter are

not very apparent today. Focus on the future, and not on the past.

A striking example is the role of women—including minority women—as graduates of the Naval Academy, and how the academic board got involved to make the admission of women a smooth transition that is now looked upon with pride. When we would go down there for an academic board meeting, one of the first things the board would do is have an evening dinner privately, with just the academic board meeting with the superintendent. That's when the superintendent would go over the sensitive issues, things that were bothering him from an academic point of view. Then the next day we'd have to have a public meeting with the faculty and whoever else wanted to come.

One of the issues that the superintendent raised every time we met with him in his private quarters was the role of women, and the admission of women into the Naval Academy. I went on the board in 1970 and I was on for ten years. Around 1972 or '73, the superintendent started saying, “You know, Congress is beginning to raise questions and these are questions that we can't ignore. We don't think we're at a point where we have to change, but at least we're going to be prepared.”

So for about two years, each superintendent—West Point, the Naval Academy at Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs—had contracts already signed, with building contractors in the local area as to what it would cost to convert the dormitories and allow the admission of women. And so they got together every quarter, the three superintendents, and they would exchange ideas—“Okay, what are you worried about, what's happening?” It was kind of a little summit meeting of the three superintendents. One of the things they would do is report to us on the academic board as to where they stood relevant to the admission of women.

Well, it turned out that if you look at the record for 1976, all three academies admitted fifty women. Now you ask yourself, how did that happen? Was this just out of the blue? Maybe they just woke up one day and there were fifty women? No. They all agreed to change together. And if we go, we're not going to admit one or two, we're going to all admit a sufficient number so that when women come here, they have a group of colleagues or peers that they can associate with.”

That was the decision in 1976. Twenty years later, the Naval Academy has graduated two thousand female graduates. Last year, of the top ten graduates grade point-wise from the Naval Academy, four of them were women. One is a brigade commander. Today, the Navy has female officers in every specialty except submarines and the Navy Seals. And as of today, women are flying F-14 jet aircraft, F-18 jet aircraft. They're combat pilots and fighter pilots. That's why it was so embarrassing for me to look back and to just listen to all the machinations of the Citadel and places like that who are trying to struggle against this. I'm just wondering, "Wait a minute. If they're supposed to be any kind of military training institution, and the three premier institutions have changed in such a way that they demonstrated that it could be done, why is it that the others can't?"

Of course, the change that led to the involvement of black men at the Naval Academy—of which I was a part—occurred much before that. It would really strike me when I would go back fifteen years after graduation as part of the academic board. From 1970 to 1980, I would be invited to sit with the superintendent up on the stage as they were giving out the diplomas. I would see this mass of young people graduating. They were all in uniform getting ready to throw their hats up in the air. And I began to see the numbers change during that time. While I was the only black in my graduating class, after I graduated the Naval Academy had two blacks in each class and then they went to about four or five in each class. You could almost just see the numbers begin to grow. But I began to see the numbers of blacks graduating from the Naval Academy go from when it was like one every other year, which was my period, to a hundred or so. The challenge now is, how do we keep the momentum going?

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# Technology and the Dream

## Reflections on the Black Experience at MIT, 1941–1999

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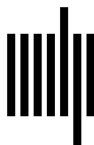
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