

BERNARD J. FRIEDEN

b. 1930, BA 1951 (English) Cornell University, MA 1953 (English) Pennsylvania State University, MCP 1957 (city planning) and PhD 1962 (city and regional planning) MIT; joined the MIT faculty in 1961, after serving as an instructor and research fellow, 1957–1961; professor of city planning, 1969–1989; Ford professor of urban development, 1989– ; director, MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies, 1971–1975; director of research, MIT Center for Real Estate Development, 1985–1987; chair, MIT Faculty, 1987–1989; associate dean, School of Architecture and Planning, 1993– ; editor, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 1962–1965; member, White House Task Force on Model Cities, 1969.

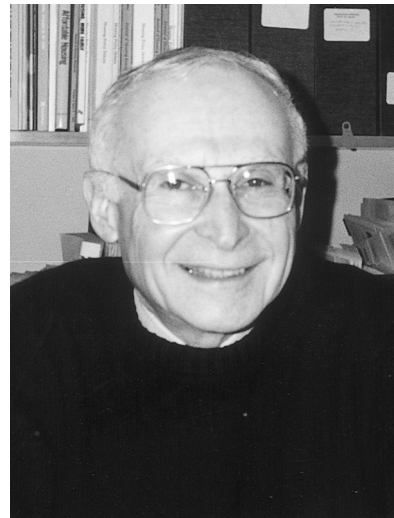


I grew up in New York City. My parents moved around quite a lot, as people did during the Depression, so it was in different parts of the city, but New York is really my background. One thing that does come to mind about that background is when I was going through the New York City schools, particularly high school—it was around the end of World War II and the first few years afterwards—it was clear to me, thinking back now although maybe it wasn't so clear at the time, that the school system was taking special pains to encourage good race relations. The school that I was in was overwhelmingly white. If there were blacks there, it couldn't have been more than half a dozen out of a school of a few thousand. The sort of thing they did was they invited a black man with a Ph.D. to come and speak to the school assembly. They didn't say much about why they invited him, but the purpose was obvious—that they wanted us to see that there were educated black people who were interesting and had intelligent things to say. They kept referring to him as Dr. Hunton all the time. I think they got a message across.

Also, in reading recent things in which people talked about the unfortunate way some blacks have been represented in the movies in the United States, I recalled that one of my high school teachers led a discussion on this topic. I think it was even in the early days of high school. She was obviously far ahead of her time. She was asking us, “Can you recall any movies in which black people were treated in a positive or a neutral sort of way?” It was hard. I remember one fellow mentioned the

movie *Sahara* with Humphrey Bogart, a World War II movie, where in North Africa, Bogart meets a black soldier from some part of Africa and he talks to him. It's just a very sort of warm person-to-person conversation where Bogart asks him, “Well, is there polygamy in your country?” He says, “Yes there is, but I have only one wife because my wife wouldn't like it if I had more than one.” That sort of thing was very rare. The person was presented in a very positive light. The teacher obviously made her point because that was about the only film that people could think of where that had happened.

There was a general push toward what would be called political correctness these days. But it was under the influence of all the racial and religious persecutions of World War II, I'm sure, that the New York City school system was bending over



Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Bernard J. Frieden in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 24 February 1997.

backward to encourage tolerance and a respect for other people. I think that had an impact on me, probably more than I realized at the time.

Another thing I would say is that just growing up in New York is a course in sociology by itself. You're certainly aware of the differences among people and the many different ethnic groups that surround you, although in my own neighborhood many white ethnic groups were represented, but there were very few black people. Throughout that early part of my life when I did meet blacks, I seemed to get along very well with them and they seemed like very nice people. My parents sent me to a camp that was run by a settlement house and the counselor was a black fellow. I liked him very much, as most of the kids did. One of the other kids in the bunk was black and I was friendly with him, and that sort of thing seemed to happen to me repeatedly. It happened again when I was in the Army that a fair number of the permanent soldiers who weren't draftees like me—I was in during the Korean War—a fair number of the permanent people on base who did basic training for us or had other jobs around the base were black. With one or two exceptions, they were very nice guys. Everybody liked them and I certainly did.

When I was stationed in Germany, one of the guys I was friendliest with was a black fellow from Boston. We did some traveling together around Europe. I gave him some help in a racist situation that developed on the base. I transferred from one outfit to another, but on the same base, and I had been in a very desirable room. It had a group of only seven or eight people in it, whereas most people were sleeping in very large dormitory-like halls of maybe fifty people. I wanted him to get my bed when I left. It was sort of an unofficial, an informal custom that you could do that. So I brought him around to show him the place, and it was obvious that he was there and he was going to get my bed. I didn't know they were racist. They weren't from the South, but they hated the idea. They thought they had a private club there and they began to make nasty remarks to me and nasty remarks to him. I asked him if he wanted to go ahead with this anyway and he said he did, he didn't mind.

So we did. I kept track of him in that situation to see whether I could be helpful, but actually he solved it by himself. People were making nasty

remarks to him, particularly at night when the lights were out. You couldn't see who was talking, so they would make nasty remarks and he said he just laughed. He would laugh really hard and they wouldn't know what to make of that. I guess what I'm saying is I had a kind of indoctrination because of the times and the way the school system was run, and I had good personal experiences.

What period did that cover?

Well, I was born in 1930. I graduated from high school in '47, so the years when I was getting my strong indoctrination would have been about '43 to '47. I was in the Army during the Korean War, from '52 to '54.

Say a little bit about your parents' background.

My parents were both born in the U.S., but their parents were not. My mother's family came from a little village near Bialystok in what's now Poland, but was part of Russia at the time. My grandparents lived there. My father's family was from what was then Austria-Hungary, but now I think it's part of western Ukraine. I have a younger brother and a younger sister. My father worked as a bookkeeper in the garment district. He managed to hold his job through the Depression, which was a terrible time. Just having a steady job was lucky. As for family, I guess I would say we were lower middle-class. We didn't do well enough to have a car or to live in a private house, but lived in apartments, which certainly was the style of New York at that time.

They couldn't afford to send me to a private university, so I started at City College in New York, which continued the ethnic education, I must say. After one semester there, I won a state scholarship which was good for going to Cornell. New York State has a special program where they give a competitive exam once a year and the winners get their tuition paid at Cornell. If they're further down the list, they don't get to Cornell, but they can use the tuition at any other college in New York State. So that determined where I was going to go to school, which was Cornell. I was an English major in those days, and I did graduate work afterwards at Penn State, where I wanted to get some teaching experience. I was a graduate instructor and also got a master's in English there.

The more I went on with English, the more I realized that it wasn't as interesting as I had thought. At the time I was drafted, I knew I wasn't

going to go on in English, but I didn't know what I would do. I did meet someone in the Army who told me about city management. As a field, it sounded interesting. When I got out, I looked that up and I discovered there was this other field—city planning—which sounded even more interesting. That's when I made my jump. It was soon afterwards that I came to MIT. I've been here ever since, except for an occasional leave.

When you came to MIT, had you already gotten your degrees at Cornell to become a professor?

No, I just had a bachelor's degree from Cornell and a master's from Penn State. If I had stayed in English and become a professor, which is probably what I would have done, I would have gotten a Ph.D. in English.

How did you connect at MIT? Was there anybody involved in suggesting that this might be a place that you should consider?

I discovered that there were publications by and about city planners and city planning, and in the journal of the professional association somebody had written a letter about the desirability of making more information available to young people who might want to go to school to study city planning. I figured he would be sympathetic and I wrote to him. He lived in Philadelphia and invited me to come to Philadelphia and meet with him. He briefed me a lot on schools to apply to, what the field was all about, and gave me the names of other people.

That was the start. I applied to several schools. I applied to three and got into them all. I was going to go to Harvard, based on Harvard's general reputation for excellence. I didn't know a thing about city planning there. Through a mutual friend, I met somebody who had started to study city planning at Harvard and had then transferred to MIT, and he told me how bad Harvard was in this field.

Do you recall the environment here and what your impressions were after a short period of time here, say within a year?

Well, the environment for me was really just what was in the Department of City and Regional Planning. I had almost no contact with the rest of MIT, except I did take economics courses. But I didn't know much about what was going on except in my own field. There was contact with

architecture also. Architecture and planning were in the same school, so students used to go out and eat together at the F&T and do things like that.

I had been in English for a while and became critical of the field. Early on I began to sense some real shortcomings of city planning. City planning, as it was taught then at MIT, was overwhelmingly planning for the suburbs, not planning for the cities. I felt that was not a great idea, and I decided that if I was ever in a position to affect the curriculum, then I would like to have more work focusing on the cities and problems of cities. The then department head, Frederick Adams, invited me to stay on and join the teaching staff after I got my master's degree. So I began to teach, and the first thing I did was suggest that in the big studio course which takes up about half of most students' time, instead of studying suburbs of Boston, why don't we study the cities?

I don't know what made me do this, but I wanted to do a project in Roxbury. It was really interesting. We brought in a couple of people from Roxbury to talk to the class and to the students. I think it was a revelation to everybody to learn more about how people were living in that part of the city. At that time, it was mixed—black and white, mostly black and Jewish.

What year was this?

I got my master's in '57, so this would have been about '58 or '59 that I was teaching my first classes. I think I should have mentioned also part of my own background. Being Jewish certainly made me aware that other minorities had also been persecuted. It got me interested in the problems of minorities, generally. I guess it gave me a predisposition to want to be helpful to anybody else who has been discriminated against.

I'm beginning to think that there is certainly a lot of correlation here among many of the faculty members whom I talk to who are Jewish and have had a sense about the whole issue of race relations—and an understanding of it, much more so than a non-Jewish person. I think that's a real justification to have in a way.

Well, it's like identifying with the underdog.

In your early years, though, what was the racial composition on campus in your department?

In my department in the year that I came in, there were no blacks or other non-whites in the class, but there had been a few blacks who came

through the program prior to that. During the first summer after I enrolled at MIT, actually through the same fellow who steered me away from Harvard, I met a classmate of his—Sam Cullers—who is black and who then had a master's degree from MIT and was working in Hartford. He sort of continued that pattern I seem to have had repeatedly of meeting black people and taking a liking to them. And I kept in touch with Sam over the years. He was a pretty bitter person at that time about the treatment of blacks in the U.S.—particularly where he grew up, which was around Chicago—but it was also clear that city planning was a good field for him to be in. In fact, he said he knew that himself. He used his city planning background to get a job in Canada at one point, where he found a refreshing lack of racism directed against blacks. He did interesting work and later went to California. For a time, he was director of planning for the state of California. After that, he went into a private consulting business.

I don't know if he was the first black, but he was certainly one of the first blacks to come through the program. The last time I saw him, which was just a couple of years ago, he really had a one-man consulting firm. I don't think he had a staff. He just did consulting on his own. At one time in the past I think he had been a member of an engineering firm.

In those early years, I started to teach before I entered the Ph.D. program. In fact, the Ph.D. program wasn't invented until after I got my master's degree. I was one of the first people into it. In those early years, though, when I was teaching—I kept teaching while I was working on the Ph.D.—there were a few other black students who came through the program. Reg Griffith was one. He's another person who would be excellent to interview. He's a very nice guy and he has had a very successful career. For a number of years he has been the director of the National Capital Planning Commission in Washington.

Another fairly early black student in the program was Phil Clay. I became his advisor. I don't remember exactly how that happened, but at any rate I took a great liking to him as soon as I met him. I had the urge to be helpful and felt I should help him in any way I could. I would consider it a good relationship over the years. I guess I had a mentoring relationship to him in the department. Essentially, I was his mentor. I'm certainly very

pleased with the career that he has had and that he has been as successful as he has been. I think he's a terrific person and MIT should hold onto him. When he got his Ph.D., I told him there was only one thing we expected of him and that was not to leave MIT for a while.

But the kind of mentoring that was helpful had to do with Phil's joining the faculty. We certainly felt that this person really had potential and, especially with a little help, that he could become a member of the faculty here. And he did. He was gone for a couple of years in the Vietnam War, but luckily he came back in good shape. As the time was approaching for tenure, I think it may have been the suggestion of Frank Jones, I took a good look at Phil's situation in the department to see if there might be any problems ahead. I felt that there possibly was a big problem ahead, in that Phil's field at that time was housing. The department was fairly small then and not likely to have more than one person in a given specialization. The department had already hired a very good recent graduate—Langley Keyes—in housing. I conveyed that to Phil and said, "I think you really ought to try to pick up another specialization, between now and when you come up for tenure." He was quick to act on that. He built up his own background and skills in demography so that when he came up for consideration for tenure, he wasn't just a second housing person—not someone like Langley Keyes—but someone with a distinct specialization of his own. I think that may have been the critical thing in his getting tenure.

During the '60s, we began to get more black students and I would say that they were of course almost all middle-class. We talked about trying hard to reach kids in the low-income communities, but that really didn't happen. Many of our students would try to give the impression that that's where they came from, but it really wasn't true. They had educated parents and went to good schools, but I think academically none of the first that we had were as good as Phil Clay. Nevertheless, they were good solid people who got their degrees and went into the field. I've kept up with them and most, I think, are doing quite well.

There have been a number of them whom I've met in different cities who are very appreciative, first of all, of their education in the department as well as the fact that

many of them actually are doing excellent work and have very good jobs playing pivotal roles where they are. I think that that says a lot about the department.

Yes, I think the department has been hospitable to them. In fact, this wasn't my doing in particular. I think most of the faculty felt that we should make an effort to get more minority students, and that when they did apply, we should bend over backward to give them every possible consideration and bend the standards a bit if necessary and then take them in. But there was a period of a couple of years where it was kind of ridiculous, when you couldn't tell from the application who was black and who wasn't. You couldn't ask for pictures. You certainly couldn't ask what an applicant's race was. We had one year when there was a marginal case and we didn't consider this person good enough to make the first cut of admission, but he was a graduate of Howard University and we figured he was probably black, so we admitted him. He turned out to be white.

Over the years, I guess as Great Society programs developed that dealt with cities, city planning became better known and I think blacks as well as whites heard about it more often. So we began to get more black applications. We also tried techniques of our own to get more applications. I don't know how successful we really were. At one point we were running a radio ad on a station that people in Roxbury listen to. I don't know whether anybody applied because of that.

Well, for at least the years that I can recall when I came to the Graduate School office in 1972, at that time when I looked at the records, the department always had the largest number of black and other minority students in the Institute and consistently did that for, I would say, probably the next ten years. I think there became an issue of funding in many cases, sort of a gradual cutting back, but basically the department has always had a large number of minority students.

Could you outline what you have liked best and least about MIT's efforts to increase the black presence on campus, faculty as well as students? What is your assessment of our recruitment and affirmative action efforts and policies during the last, say, two decades?

Well, I've observed, as you have, that the city planning department seemed to be the most active department by far. I think the MIT administration has encouraged departments to go out and recruit more blacks. But my sense is that in a lot of depart-

ments, the faculty probably don't care much about it. If they were more concerned about doing it, I think they would have done more. What they could have done, I really don't know.

One of the comments that has been made to me—in fact just today, and certainly in past interviews I've had, particularly with non-black faculty members—is that particularly in the sciences and engineering it's because of the limited pool that we have not been able to attract black faculty members and in some cases black students and other minority students.

I think faculty are another story, separate from the problem of identifying good minority students. I think in this respect also, I get the impression that city planning is creating statistics for all of MIT. We have had a series of black people on the faculty, most of whom, however, didn't stay very long for one reason or another. There was Bill Davis, for example. Everyone had his own story here. Bill was fine, a good teacher and a sharp lawyer, but he got an offer from a top law firm in Washington at probably something like triple his MIT salary, so what were we supposed to do? So Bill took off. We did have at one point Ted Landsmark, too. I don't know exactly what happened with Ted, but he stayed only a year or two. Mel King, of course, was recruited early. That was around 1970 or so that Mel King came in.

Hubie Jones, right?

Oh, yes. Hubie is another one who was here for a couple of years. Then Hubie got a much better offer to go to BU and become a dean. The department didn't make any serious effort to hold on to him when he had that kind of offer. In retrospect, they really should have.

The problem of recruiting minority faculty is that when the time is coming close for tenure decisions, in terms of their age and how many years they've been at MIT, we didn't see a tenure case there. So that meant we had this turnover that would mean recruiting people, but they were not joining the permanent faculty. In the case of Phil Clay, that was really a different strategy. We don't exactly know how to find black people with Ph.D.'s who are qualified for faculty positions. Here was a guy, however, who had the potential and we could sort of grow our own. That's what we did in Phil's case.

You also did that with Hassan Minor.

Hassan Minor, that's right. He was on the faculty for a couple of years also. But again, he followed that same pattern. I don't remember very specifically why he left, but he stayed only a couple of years.

Well, I think the one thing I can say about your department is that it seems to me that all of you try different strategies. Some of them didn't work completely, but there was at least an attempt to try some different kinds of ways of being able to bring black presence on the faculty. I think at one point you had something like four or five black faculty members, when Bill Davis and a number of the others were there. When I looked at how these people were there, how you brought them in, there were strategies almost by each one of them, and I wondered why another department could not do that with some chemist or some biologist. You weren't successful on all of them as far as them staying, but at least there was an attempt to make these efforts. I found that very encouraging in that sense.

Well, we certainly tried, and there were some ingenious people on the faculty. We calculated what some good strategies would be. In the case of Mel King, for example, to get him on board, there was no such thing at the time as an adjunct professor at MIT. Lloyd Rodwin got together with another department that had a similar situation to invent this and present it to the MIT faculty to get him in the door. That made it possible to bring in Mel King. That's the same thing—seeing an obstacle, but also figuring out a solution to get around that obstacle.

Exactly. I found that quite interesting. Even in the other area, the student area, which is a little different, I thought that there were creative ways there. Even the way that the department came to ask for money for the graduate students, they had a unique way of structuring things so that you had to at least say, "Well, hey, they want to try." That's what I thought was encouraging, and I think to this day you have many more supporters out in the society because you have put these people out there after they have been brought in and trained.

That's right. I didn't say anything about the finances, but of course we had to go and find fellowship money or scholarship money for these people, and we did. We were able in some cases to use federal programs that were intended specifically for minorities, or in other cases donors would step in. Fortunately for us, these programs were explicitly for recruiting minorities; otherwise, we

could get in trouble for reverse discrimination. So we did those things. I also would have to say that in some respects some people, if not the whole department, did pay a price for doing that.

We had, I think, two occasions where there were junior faculty members who were white who were much criticized by black students. The students felt that they were too demanding and maybe not effective at teaching what they tested students on, and in both cases their careers at MIT were halted by that; there were enough complaints. I think the fact is that probably in both cases these were pretty demanding people, but they were equally demanding of whites and blacks. But the black students mobilized and raised their complaints and made life very difficult for these junior faculty members, and I think soured the rest of the department a bit on trying to help them build a case for tenure. So they both left.

That brings up another question. Consider the role played by senior mentors and role models in career development for newcomers of all races. What can you say about that?

I think it's very important. In fact, you asked me my impression of MIT and its efforts generally. Well, this is a general problem at MIT, that there is not good mentoring. There is not good mentoring in my own department. Recently, some rather unfortunate situations came to light where it appeared that senior faculty were taking advantage of junior faculty in unfair ways. Just last year, the department set up a faculty committee on junior faculty that they asked me to chair. It was really for the purpose of protecting them and mentoring them, giving them an accurate sense of what it was they had to do at MIT, and listening to their problems and trying to help them find solutions to their problems. I think this place is not particularly good at that. It's a very demanding atmosphere to be in. I think most departments are not giving a lot of attention to helping junior faculty to survive.

What are some of the things you think are key in terms of senior mentoring, helping younger faculty members?

I think mostly listening to their problems and trying to help them deal with them. They each have somewhat different problems. It's not a consistent thing. Some, for example, might need certain kinds of data to pursue the research that they need to do and they don't find a place at MIT that collects it or processes it where they could get it. There are

other universities that have survey research centers, let's say, so we try to work around that, put them in touch with UMass-Boston, which has a survey research center where they can get some of the materials they lack. Others, I think, come in and don't have an accurate sense of what standards they're expected to meet. You have to break the news to them about what the standards are. They're not happy to hear it, but they appreciate the fact that we are leveling with them about what they're going to have to do to stay.

I want to make it more personal, because I know that you have played a major role in the life of a number of young faculty members. How much more specific can you be in terms of what you have tried to do to help young junior faculty members to survive? I know in the past that many of them have come to you and probably still do. You have a sense of it. You are probably one of the giants in that area, in my opinion.

Thank you.

I'm really interested in pushing you a little bit to talk about what you look for and what you try to do. It obviously is very good, because it works.

Well, I'm not sure that I know. Most of what I can think of is that I give them a sense of what's expected of them and help them to do those things, and particularly with publication. Maybe there I did have more interest and skill than others in writing, researching, and making the research presentable to other people. So the sort of thing I've done is to try to discover what their research interests are.

First of all, if I don't know anything about the field that they're working in—which happens from time to time—I put them in touch with people who do, but then monitor the situation, seeing that they're okay. “Are you getting help from these other people? Are they including you in the research projects that they're doing in this field that you're interested in? Can you get on board with them? Do you need help with fundraising?” I try to get them that help and offer to make life easier for them—“Look, I will be glad to read your proposal and make suggestions about it. If you're working on a book, I'll be glad to read the manuscript.” I try to help them in very specific ways, product-oriented.

Well, that's very helpful. Is there any advice that you would offer to a young black faculty member coming into

MIT as it stands today—coming into the department or coming into MIT, because you've seen the broader picture as well?

I would give the kind of advice I've given to people in my own department, which is—don't be provincial, get around the place, don't just stay within the department. It's a very rich place and you'll find very interesting people in other departments whom you might work with, or they'll appreciate your work and you'll appreciate theirs. So get out and around, and don't make too many commitments, but serve on a couple of faculty committees so you will meet other people from other parts of the Institute.

I would certainly suggest that. Otherwise, it's partly mapping out a careful plan for the use of your own time. Do your best to help people. Make sure that they get a six-month leave, say, when they're at the stage where they've got to produce something significant in order to get the next promotion, when they're coming up for tenure. But it's tough to do all the things you have to do at MIT and still find time to do your research, at least around my department. So you try to get around that by having your department give you the time off.

Sometimes I'll argue with senior faculty that the load they put on junior faculty is too heavy. We discovered that one junior faculty member was being asked to handle all MCP admissions. That's a big job and that's really unfair to him. If he puts the time into that, then I think he's not putting his time into his teaching or his research. So it's partly protecting people against that, in a way. I don't know that I can say more.

Well, that's a lot. Is there any other topic or issue or incident that comes to mind as you reflect on your own experience as it possibly relates to the experience of blacks at MIT?

There is one other thing I should say about the efforts of the city planning department to recruit minority students and faculty. I think over and above just feeling that this is the right thing to do, there's also a feeling that it's important to the profession, that most of the urban problems have to do with blacks in cities. It's important, therefore, to have blacks well represented in the profession who can work on these problems and can also give the profession the credibility it needs to deal with that. That, I suspect, is something special to us. There are no special needs relating to blacks in chemistry.

Also, I think maybe there's not a sufficient appreciation of the fact that even in the teaching setting, there's a lot of two-way learning that takes place. It isn't all the professors speaking and the students absorbing things. As I began to have more black students in my classes, particularly in the '60s, it was a very healthy thing, because I and the other whites in the class were getting a valuable perspective from people.

Maybe I should mention some other things that I was doing outside of MIT. I had a chance to work on some of the Great Society programs. I was on the White House task force when HUD was created. I was on the staff of the task force. Part of the assignment from Lyndon Johnson was not only to design an organization which would become the next Cabinet department, but also to suggest what programs it should have. I worked very hard on what became the Model Cities program, drafting legislation for it and figuring out what that would cost and how to package it so that Congress would conceivably pass it. After this, I did a critical book evaluating the results.

For people who worked on the formulation of the program like me, the results were very disappointing, because essentially it got lost in the Washington bureaucracy and other agencies didn't cooperate with HUD. The program made so many promises and achieved so little, when you looked at the results. I presented it that way in one of my classes and one black woman in the class said, "Well, that may be, but I got my first job through the Model Cities program." That led to a very useful conversation. It got me really thinking about things.

I think one of the things you have mentioned is the role that you played not only inside the Institute, but also outside of the Institute. During the period when we had the riots in 1967, again, the whole idea of the Great Society came up that Lyndon Johnson responded to, I guess, after the task force or the commission that produced the Kerner Report went in and looked at some of the causes of the problems, the riots in the cities. You were talking a little bit about that.

Yes. I mentioned earlier that I tended to become critical of the city planning profession after I had gone through the master's program. I really started out in my teaching and writing career in that frame of mind because I, and also the Kerner Commission, felt that some of the urban programs

of city planners had been contributors to the atmosphere that led to the riots. Typically, the urban highway program and urban renewal both displaced large numbers of poor, minority people—particularly blacks—and did next to nothing for them, and naturally enough were a big irritant in their lives. When the Kerner Commission did their surveys and tried to find out what reasons people gave for having participated in the riots, I think the number one complaint was about the police, but these urban programs weren't too far behind. They were maybe about the third level. There was urban renewal, also known then as "Negro removal."

I felt that the first thing to do was to reverse those programs and certainly not to create another program like that. Much of my work on the Model Cities program was on how to prevent it from following the path of urban renewal. It had been taken over by people who didn't mind displacing anybody who got in their way. The early teaching that I did was mostly on social policy issues like relocation and how relocation could be done in a humane way. How could urban renewal be done in a more humane way? That was both my intellectual interest and my moral commitment at the time.

That is a very important period, and I think it was a very frightening period for a lot of people in America. I think people really didn't know what to do about it and probably had ignored the problem for a long time.

Yes. My feeling was that if urban development couldn't do what was right, at least it could stop doing things that were wrong.

I think there are some things here that will tie in very much with what we're trying to put together, and that you could be very helpful, particularly in terms of a department that—probably more so than any other department—has tried to do some things within the framework of its mission. I've felt that way for some time, and I know that you have played a major role in that. I might add, too, that I have talked to at least three blacks who have come through that department, and all of them have mentioned you as a very influential person.

I'm glad to hear that.

So I don't come to you without having some sense of the commitment that you have made over the years.

Well, maybe I could put MIT in a broader context. There were some interesting things. When I

was chair of the faculty and I sat on the Academic Council, Shirley McBay was there, and I got to know Shirley fairly well. At that time, and maybe it's to this day, there was an informal exchange every year or two where MIT faculty and administrators would go to Caltech and at alternate times Caltech people would come here. Well, Caltech came once concerned about the lack of diversity in their own student body and their own faculty, and they had been shown much better figures at MIT. They came and wanted to find out more about it. They investigated, and as they looked department by department, I was there when someone—maybe the president of Caltech or one of the senior people there—said, “Now that we’ve looked department by department, it seems to us that the departments in which you have all your black students and faculty are not the departments that you have in common with us. In the science and engineering departments, you don’t have them, either.”

Shirley said she was at one of those meetings when MIT went out to Caltech. They were sitting around in a conference room and it became clear that there were very few black students at Caltech. The faculty was concerned about it and the administration was concerned about it. Shirley finally said, “Well, exactly how many black students do you have?” At that point, a black fellow went by on a bicycle outside the window and one of the people in the room said, “That’s him.”

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/6689.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6689.001.0001)

Technology and the Dream

Reflections on the Black Experience at MIT, 1941–1999

By: Clarence G. Williams

Citation:

Technology and the Dream: Reflections on the Black Experience at MIT, 1941–1999

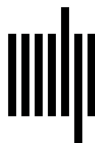
By: Clarence G. Williams

DOI: 10.7551/mitpress/6689.001.0001

ISBN (electronic): 9780262286305

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2003



The MIT Press

First MIT Press paperback edition, 2003

©2001 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book was set in Bembo by The MIT Press.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Williams, Clarence G.

Technology and the dream : reflections on the Black experience at MIT, 1941–1999 / Clarence G. Williams.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-262-23212-X (hc. : alk. paper), 0-262-73157-6 (pb)

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology—History.
2. Afro-American college students—Massachusetts—Cambridge—Interviews. I. Title.

T171.M49 .W55 2001

378.744'4—dc21

00-052707

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2