

PAUL E. GRAY

b. 1932, SB 1954, SM 1955, ScD 1960 (electrical engineering) MIT; joined the MIT faculty in 1960; professor of electrical engineering, 1967– ; dean, School of Engineering, 1970–1971; chancellor, 1971–1980; president, 1980–1990; chair, MIT Corporation, 1990–1997; returned to the faculty as professor of electrical engineering in 1997; chair, Task Force on Educational Opportunity, 1968–1973; member, National Academy of Engineering, elected 1975; member, Committee on Minorities in Engineering, Assembly of Engineering, National Research Council, 1974–1979.



I was born in Newark, New Jersey. My mother and father lived on Second Street in Newark. I was born in the Women's and Children's Hospital in Newark, which I think no longer exists as such. I lived in Newark until I was about two. I have no memories, really, of anything of those years in Newark.

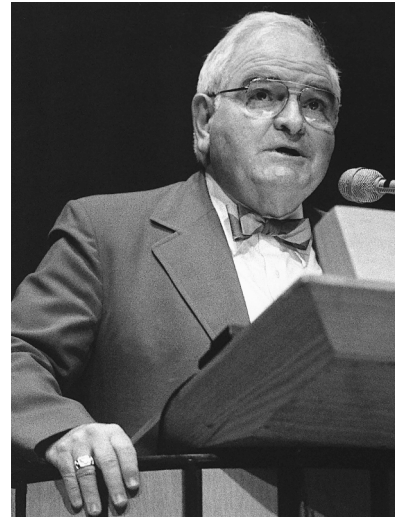
When I was somewhere between two and three, my family moved to East Orange, New Jersey, a little west of Newark. We lived at 369 North Grove Street in East Orange until I was about ten. That's where I started school, at an East Orange public elementary school which was just down at the corner of Grove Street and Springdale Avenue in East Orange. I went there, it must have been through about fourth grade—or part way in the fifth grade, I guess, because we moved in the middle of the year. When I was about ten, my family moved from East Orange to Livingston, New Jersey, which was a little farther west—twelve or thirteen miles from Newark. That's where I lived until I came away to college. My mother lived there until eighteen months ago, when she had to go to a nursing home.

After moving to Livingston, I went to public schools there. I finished elementary school at the Roosevelt School in Livingston and then went to junior high school two years there. Livingston, New Jersey, now is a New York bedroom community, about forty thousand people. When we moved there in 1942, it was a town of less than three thousand people. It was a farming community, truck farming mostly. The town did not have enough population to sustain a high school. We traveled by

bus about eight miles each day to Caldwell, New Jersey. I went to high school there in what was then called the Grover Cleveland High School in Caldwell. I graduated from the Caldwell high school in 1950. Those were my educational settings in the years before I came here. I came here in September 1950 as a freshman.

What about any interracial contacts during that period of time? Could you reflect on your earliest memories of contact with blacks, or any evolution of your own views in that regard?

I believe that I never had a personal contact with a black person—man, woman, or child—through my graduation from high school. East Orange now is a heavily black community; it was not in the 1930s. I don't believe there were any black folks who lived in Livingston, and there were none in my class at Caldwell. I'm trying to think of other



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settings in which I might have encountered black folks, but I don't believe there were any. I don't think I encountered black folks probably until I got involved in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) here and went off to ROTC summer camp, when I was nineteen or twenty years old.

Do you recall any highlight in that period, when you first encountered black people in ROTC training?

No. If you generalize the question and say, when did I first have ongoing relationships with black folks in a professional sense—or in any sense, a social sense—it was not until I was involved here as a graduate student and faculty member in the late '50s, early '60s.

How did you decide to come to MIT as an undergraduate student?

I've got to tell you something about my family for you to understand that. I was an only child. I was a child of the Depression, born in 1932. My mother is a high-school graduate and had worked as a secretary for a while. My father never went to high school. He left school in World War I to go to work. He spent most of his life working in a public utility, Public Service Electric and Gas, which is the utility that supplies most of northern New Jersey. It's a company where Shirley Jackson later served on the board. He started working for Public Service as an electrician, and soon became what was known at that time as a "load dispatcher."

Now, any utility at that time had to have a set of people at work twenty-four hours a day. It was a shift job. The function of those folks was to buy power or sell power, but to do it in such a way that supply and demand matched. They had to anticipate how the demand was going to shift over the day, whether it was winter or summer, and if they had excess generating capacity they arranged to sell power to other parts of the Northeast that needed it. If they had insufficient capacity, they bought power. So, it was a job which at that time took people who had reasonable knowledge of the system and reasonable judgment to do this task manually, essentially, by telephone interaction with parts of the company and with other companies in the region. Those jobs have all been replaced. That's done now by computer. It's kind of a well understood, rule-based function which is done entirely automatically.

My father worked in that job until he retired in 1965. In that job, the people he worked for—

the people he learned from, took his direction from, and was accountable to—were all engineers. I think if times had been different, if his life experience had been different, my father probably would have pursued a career in engineering. He liked doing things with his hands. He cultivated that interest in me. As early as I can remember, I fooled around with microscopes and chemical sets and electricity. I made things. I was involved with amateur radio, made all my own gear. But I tell you this story because, from as early as I can remember, his view of what I ought to do with my life was be an engineer. Engineers were from his perspective sort of the next step up the social ladder. They were the people he worked for.

I can remember—probably at about age twelve to fourteen, before I was in high school certainly—we took a trip. My mother and father and my grandmother, who lived with us, and I—four of us—went in a 1936 Plymouth. This must have been right at the end of the World War II because it was after gas rationing had ended. I was probably thirteen or fourteen. We took a trip up through New England. We started out and came up the New York border and Vermont and New Hampshire and the White Mountains and over the coast of Maine and down. We stopped in Cambridge to see MIT. We didn't go into the buildings, but we drove by. There were trolley cars coming across the bridge at that time. My father had talked with engineers whom he knew and respected in the company about where a youngster should go if he wants the best engineering education. Everybody said, "Go to MIT." So that was sort of fixed in my head before I ever got to high school. As I say, we didn't stop here—we just drove across the bridge, drove around the place, and left.

When it came time to apply to colleges, I applied to four. I applied to MIT and Yale. Yale at that time had the Sheffield School of Engineering, and substantial engineering activity. I applied to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and I applied to Cooper Union, which was in New York City, a lower Manhattan school. I was admitted to all four of those. I applied for financial aid at all of them. The choice for me narrowed down rather quickly to MIT, Yale, and RPI. Both Yale and RPI had offered me quite a lot of financial aid, and MIT had not. I was about to make the decision to go to Yale. My high-school English teacher said to me,

in effect, “You’d be a fool to go anywhere except MIT, so turn the others down and go to MIT.” She was an enormous influence on my life, just in terms of what she taught me. I had her for four years in high school. She taught all four years of English. I was in the college prep track and I had the good fortune to have her all four years. My parents and I ruminated over her advice about MIT and, in the end, this is where I accepted. It was a fortunate choice. Had I gone to Yale, it was only a few years later—mid-fifties—that Yale abandoned engineering and closed down the Sheffield School. This was and is a better place than RPI to get an education.

So, how did I get here? It was a combination of influence from my father, influence in two senses—one, he cultivated in me what I suppose was a natural interest in doing things with my hands, in doing things particularly that were electrical in nature; and also the direct influence of him being convinced that this was the place to go. It was also Mrs. Morford, Emily Morford, the high-school English teacher, who really pushed me over the edge when it came time to make a decision to come. I stayed in touch with her. She lived to be ninety-seven years old. She retired to Florida. She died only two or three years ago. She saw me be elected president of MIT. She wasn’t here, but we communicated. My last conversation with her on the telephone was about two weeks before she died. She was not in her right mind at that point, but we had stayed in touch. She was important to me. There were other people in school—the physics teacher, a math teacher, all were important people—but she was the one who had in a way the greatest influence on my career in high school. I suppose all of us have had the experience of having in our lives one or two or three teachers who have made all the difference. She was the one who made the difference before I came to MIT.

There was one man here at MIT who made the difference for me in my experiences here. That was Tom Jones. He came back here to be vice president after he retired as president of the University of South Carolina.

He was in Course VI?

Yes. When I was an undergraduate, Tom was teaching the sophomore course in electrical engineering. That’s when I got acquainted with him. He

soon, part way through that sophomore year, offered me a job. I needed the work while I was here during the year. I did a variety of things. I worked stacking books in the engineering library up under the Dome. I worked washing dishes at the Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity house. Tom recruited me to calibrate instruments in the Instrumentation Laboratory. I did that for two or three years. I ended up doing a bachelor’s thesis for him, and the next year doing a master’s thesis for him.

When I finished the master’s thesis, I never wanted to see this place again. I had had it right up to here, a little higher. I had been a full-time student for five years and I was fed up with it. I had my commission (I had been commissioned in ROTC), I was married after my master’s degree that summer, and we were going off to be in the Army. As I left, as I prepared to leave, Tom said, “Why don’t we appoint you teaching assistant in EE? You can take a leave of absence and go off and serve your time for Uncle Sam, and then come back and take some more education.” And I wasn’t having it at all. I had had enough. So I turned that down and went away. After a year and a half in the Army, I kind of mellowed a little about MIT and came back to see Tom. He was still teaching in electrical engineering. He offered me the teaching assistant position that I had refused two years earlier. That’s how I came back here, and I haven’t left since.

I have to say more about my father. I’ve told you how he was convinced that this was where I ought to go to learn to be an electrical engineer. But the other part of his dream for me was that I would get my degree in engineering and go to work in industry. I suppose he assumed I would go to work for Public Service Electric and Gas—which of course I never did, never had any interest in doing. I was not interested in the electric utility industry. He understood and supported me in the emotional sense. At that time I was financially independent, but he supported me in coming back to graduate school to get a doctorate. Education was something he respected. But at the end of that three years of graduate study, when I got my doctorate, I knew then that what I wanted to do was stay here as a faculty member. I knew that the thing that gave me the most satisfaction was the involvement with students and teaching. From the time I told him that it was my intention to take a faculty appointment as assistant professor

and stay here, he was ever more dissatisfied. He was really bitterly disappointed, so disappointed and so expressive of his disappointment that for the last ten or fifteen years of his life—he only lived to 1971, he died of cancer quite early—that last eleven years after I accepted the appointment here until his death, we were never quite reconciled on it. That's how strongly he felt about it. It was, in his mind, a mistake. Now, he lived long enough to know that I was elected to be chancellor of the Institute in 1971, spring of '71. He died in the fall of '71, about a week after my inauguration as chancellor. He lived long enough to know that, but that didn't matter to him. I was still in the wrong place. I should have taken all that education and gone out to do something useful, in his view. It ended up being a sad time for me because the relationship was never the same after.

You asked me what my first experiences were with blacks. I really ought to say that my father—and you have to understand this in terms of the generation, he was born in 1900—was a dyed-in-the-wool bigot when it came to anyone different from him. Now, he didn't pick particularly on black folks, but on anybody who wasn't like him—who wasn't white and Protestant. I grew up with that. My wife grew up in really the same sort of circumstances. Priscilla grew up in a family where there was a good deal of intolerance and bigotry expressed. That, I think, was to some degree a generational thing.

What is interesting about what I know and have read about you—and I'm trying to get some sense of it—is that your efforts in this whole arena, in working to help blacks to be what they can be, at least here, and where you've spent your whole life, is extraordinary. I'm trying to see where all that came from. If you say you didn't get a lot of experience in your early educational process and early life, how can you be so different from so many people who happen to be white whom I know? That's what I'm struggling with, to try to see if you can give us any insight on that.

I don't know. I haven't in my own life been introspective about that in the way you're asking me now to be. Certainly some of it was the sense when you're a student here—when you're an undergraduate student here, or a graduate student here—that your world is very small. I mean, at that time in the undergraduate program here it was really lock-step. Everybody, all nine hundred of us,

took exactly the same freshman year, exactly the same. When you got your stuff from the Institute in the summer before you arrived, there was a listing which showed what section you were in by alphabet. You went to all your classes with that same set of twenty-five or thirty people. You went to lectures with them, went to all the recitations with them, you did everything with them.

That's quite different from the way it is now.

Oh yes, enormously different. Now, the upper-class years weren't quite that rigid. Sophomore year was still pretty tied down. You were in a department now. I was in electrical engineering, but you had your choice of communications or electronics or power—those were the three options—and once you decided on an option you took your classes with the same set of folks. Of course, as a graduate student where you're principally doing research, you're in a laboratory with a half dozen other graduate students—or a dozen—and a couple of faculty members, and that's what your focus is.

That's what I meant by saying that as a student here your world was very small. You kind of had two worlds. You had the world of the people you went to class with, same set of folks, and then you had the world of the people where you lived. Through that time—really through the decade of the 1950s, with two years taken out to be in the Army, when I did not have much contact with blacks or other minorities—all my time here at MIT was pretty isolated. It wasn't until I came back as a faculty member in effect, until I finished school—I joined the faculty in 1960—that I began to have a larger view of MIT.

I think there were perhaps two experiences in the early '60s that influenced me in my perceptions and views on the questions you're asking. One was the realization, as I got to be involved in 1962, maybe, as chairman of the Freshman Advisory Council, that we had more blacks here from Africa than we had from the United States in those years. And that just didn't seem right. The other experience was a more personal one. It was in connection with the fraternity in which I lived. That was a national fraternity. It had a chapter at Boston University. Somewhere in that period, early 1960s, when I was chapter advisor here—I was the faculty member who was for a couple of years advisor to the local chapter—the chapter at

Boston University decided it was going to initiate a black man. You'd have thought it was the end of the world, as far as the national was concerned. They came down hard on the Boston University chapter. They disenfranchised them. Other chapters in the area got involved, in the sense of expressing views on it. I didn't know anybody at the BU chapter, I didn't know the person they were planning on initiating, but that whole reaction from these elderly men who were running the fraternity down in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, seemed to me really grossly unfair and unreasonable. My view on national fraternities has been different ever since. That had an effect, I think.

Those are the only two experiences that I can cite that I think perhaps left me in a state of mind that was receptive to the task that Howard Johnson gave me in 1968.

I want to get to that point because I remember that being a pivotal assignment—leadership of the Task Force on Educational Opportunity. But before we get to that, is there anything else you can think about in your undergraduate experience? Were there blacks around during your undergraduate education? Was there any kind of contact, relationship, or any event that you can think of that occurred during that time?

There were undoubtedly blacks in the class of 1954, but there was never one in any of my classes.

Were there any women?

There was one woman, Jane—she wasn't Dennis then. She married Jack Dennis, a faculty member who retired a few years ago. She was a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. I've forgotten what her maiden name was, but Jane was in most of my classes through those years. She was the only woman I encountered in my undergraduate years here. As a graduate student, she worked in the same lab I worked in. So I didn't have any personal contact, either where I lived or where I went to school, through those years with blacks.

Talk a little bit about that first assignment. Why did Howard give it to you?

Well, I think I understand the answer to that question. Let me say first that the event that changed the world at MIT—forever changed MIT—was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in April 1968. I was not here at that time. We, the whole

family, were in north Wales at the University College of North Wales, where I was on sabbatical leave—the only sabbatical I've ever had. We had gone in the winter of '67-'68 and planned to return in September of 1968. In fact, we were traveling around continental Europe by car in the latter part of March and the month of April, just so the kids could see something of Europe. We were in St. Peter's Square on the morning after King was assassinated. The first we knew of it was when I saw a newsstand, just outside the Square, and I knew enough Italian that I could read the headline. That was the first we heard of it.

I've got to back up. Ken Wadleigh asked me if I would be the faculty member who chaired the Freshman Advisory Council—'62 or '63—which I agreed to do. A couple of years later, in 1965, he asked me if I would come to work for him half-time as associate dean of student affairs to continue doing in a way what I was doing with the Freshman Advisory Council, but also to help implement what was in 1965 a new undergraduate curriculum. There was a committee called the CCCP, the Committee on Curriculum Content Planning, which was chaired by Jerrold Zacharias. The Committee worked through '63 and '64 to rethink the undergraduate curriculum. Its recommendations were adopted by the faculty in the '64-'65 year. You've probably seen the report. It was an 8½" by 11" document with a big red cover. It just had the initials CCCP—which of course were the initials for the Soviet Union—in Russian, it's CCCP. A bit of a joke on Zach's part.

The report was adopted, and there were going to be big changes in the freshman year. Ken asked me if I would come to work for him half time to help implement those changes, which I did. I worked for Ken as associate dean for a couple of years doing this. During that time, Jerry Wiesner came back from Washington and was appointed dean of science. Then, when Howard became president in the summer of 1966, Jerry became provost. In the summer of 1967, Jerry asked me if I would come to work in his office doing the same sort of things—undergraduate program—as the assistant provost. There were three people in the Provost's Office. It was Jerry as provost, Rosenblith as associate provost, and I was assistant provost.

I did that through part of 1967. Then in that winter, we went off on sabbatical leave. While we

were away, after the assassination, the Black Students Union got created. Shirley Jackson and Jim Turner created the BSU, twenty-something people—I think that’s right. Jim Turner got a Ph.D. in physics. Those two folks—Shirley and Jim—brought together the quite small number of American blacks at MIT at that point. Shirley had graduated that year, she was class of ’68 as an undergraduate. They organized the BSU. Early in September, when the school year started, the BSU sent to Howard—this must be on the record—a list of ... I was about to say demands, but I don’t think they phrased it that way, I think they phrased it as “requests,” a dozen or so. They had to do with what you would expect. They had to do with increasing the number of blacks admitted, student aid, and support—those items.

I came back from Wales in the first two weeks in September. I was here for registration day. About the same time, Howard got this request from the BSU—this list of items that they wanted addressed. My belief has always been that Howard looked around and said, “Who can I tag to work on this problem?” And I was just back—with my batteries charged, presumably. He said, “Gray, do this. Would you please take this on?” That led to the formation of what was called the Task Force on Educational Opportunity, which I chaired for several years. Shirley and Jim, John Mims, eventually Jim Bishop, Jim Turner, were all members.

And it sort of went from there. That’s how it got started. Why was it me? It was because I was back, I had had eight months away to finish the task I was working on, which was finishing that book that I wrote with Camp Searle, an undergraduate electronics textbook. That was done, Howard knew it was done, and I was somebody in the Provost’s Office whom he could tag to try and work on this.

There are a couple of things I want to get your impression of before 1968, but this task force is a major piece, even in terms of what we’re doing today. Can you talk a little bit about your role and reflect a little on the nature of your close relationship with people who were involved in that task force—students, faculty, and administrators? Could you talk about the major undertaking to get the institution to do a lot of the things that you were confronted with by students from 1968 to 1972?

During those early years, by which I mean September of ’68 through probably 1971, this was

an extremely intense activity. For a while in that fall we were meeting more than once a week. The task force was meeting more than once a week. It would meet for several hours each time. You’ve got to remember that the task force was not terribly well defined in terms of who ought to be involved. It was picked up; I kind of pulled it together. It had people on it like Ken Wadleigh and Jack Frailey and the director of admissions, who must have been either Greeley or Richardson at that point.

Other people who were interested in this issue sort of got collected in, got drawn in. Harold Isaacs was one of them. He was professor of political science. He had been a newspaper man, he had been a journalist much of his life. He had written a lot about relations between the races—not so much about America, although he had written books about American black and white relations, but he had written about India and about China and other parts of the world. He died about ten years ago. Harold got involved because he was interested in these questions, professionally interested. Students got drawn in on the basis of their interest and their ability to put time into it. Shirley and Jim Turner were there, of course, but there were other students who were involved in that first year. I can’t name any of them at this point, but it stands on the record and we can look it up. There are others who were involved.

And it was very intense. We sort of lived it all the time, even when we weren’t in a meeting, because the issues we were dealing with were so fundamental in a way to the institution. The institution was being asked to change significantly. The task of the task force, in a way, was to figure out how we could make changes as rapidly as possible without breaking anything, without having a revolution. There were plenty of folks who thought we ought not do this.

There were some marvelous misunderstandings that went on for weeks and weeks. I’ll give you an example—the one that sticks in my mind, the most outstanding. The students said, in this list that they presented the president, that black students admitted to MIT should receive ... and they used a phrase something like “full financial support.” We at that point had been for three or four years on need-based aid. MIT wasn’t always on need-based aid, but, beginning about 1965, all aid was awarded on the basis of need. Just as it is now,

every needy student gets the first X dollars in loan or work time, and the rest of it is grant. X at that point was twelve hundred dollars. But one of those requests put forward by the students was “full financial support.” What Wadleigh and Frailey and Richardson—or Greeley, whoever it was—and I thought that meant was financial support up to total cost, full financial support, that is, that these students would receive their entire cost of MIT, a standard student budget from the Institute.

We found that to be not just problematic but unacceptable. It turned out that what the students meant by that was that whatever the need was ought to be fully met in the form of a scholarship. They still wanted it need-based. There’s a standard student budget—what it costs a student to spend a year at MIT. It’s thirty thousand dollars now. At that time, it must have been—I don’t know—five or six thousand dollars, something in that range. The aid practice at that time was that a student applied for aid, you looked at the family situation, and you said, for example, “This family can contribute a thousand dollars to this student’s education and the total standard student budget is five thousand dollars, therefore that student has a need of four thousand dollars.” The first twelve hundred dollars would come in the form of loan and the remaining twenty-eight hundred dollars would be in the form of scholarship. That was the policy we were operating under. When students said “We want full financial support,” all of the staff and faculty in the room thought they meant “We want five thousand dollars a year for each student, we want enough to meet the standard student budget.” What they meant was, “We want enough to meet the student’s need and it should all be scholarship, no loan.” A very different meaning.

You’ll find this hard to believe, but we fought over that for two or three months until finally—like the light coming on, like a revelation from God—it was suddenly clear we were talking about two different things. Once that misunderstanding got shoved aside, we had no disagreement. It seems impossible that this set of people could meet together for that long and not understand they were talking about different things, but that was what happened.

Do you have any sense of how you came to grips with the fact that you were talking about two different things?

I don’t know how we got to that point, but the result of that was that we created an aid policy for minorities. Then we were talking just about black students, that defined minority. That got widened, as you well know, to include Hispanics and Native Americans rather quickly. But the result was we defined an aid policy which said black students admitted to MIT will receive aid up to their need, and it was going to be all in the form of scholarship. That got changed then in the next few years, so that there was a self-help level which was less than the self-help level for everyone else. Eventually, some time around the middle 1970s, that aspect of the policy got eliminated.

But that’s the example that stands out in my mind of how a set of folks can sit around a table for a couple of months, think they understand each other, and be talking about two very different things. These meetings, the early meetings of the task force were, as I said, intense. They were tense as well, but they were seldom confrontational.

You did not feel that students were confronting you.

No, maybe I used the wrong word. I mean, they were confrontational in the sense that here were a set of students pressing their agenda that was requiring the place to change—and that was, in a sense, a confrontation. But the meetings were not shouting matches, ever. They were not mean-spirited or angry in the sense of people shouting at each other. This was a great blessing because we were dealing with hard problems. If we had begun to dislike each other, or take offense at each other, it would have gone awry. There was only one member of the task force in those early years who insisted on making it confrontational. He would get up and storm out of the meeting angrily. One of those times he called me a phrase I’ll not repeat, storming out of the meeting. That was the only person involved in that whole process who really wanted to make this a fight.

So did you sense that there was a white-black issue in any of these confrontations? Again, that may have been the most intense situation that you had actually been in. Yes, it certainly was.

Or, in fact, that any white professor at the Institute would have been in during this early period after Martin Luther King was killed and particularly after you began to look at what things were being done here.

Yes. I think there was only one other time in my life when I was in a situation where there was as much intensity and tension. That was when I was in the Army, when I served for a year, I guess. You know, when you're an officer in the Army—if you're a junior officer in the Army—you get all kinds of assignments in addition to your principal duties. You get to be supply officer, you get to be top-secret control officer. I was assigned for a period to be the officer who represented the Army in summary court martials. These were usually dealing with relatively minor offenses involving enlisted men—you know, somebody went AWOL for a week or did some other thing which was regarded as a minor offense, what we would call, I guess, a misdemeanor in our legal system. I was assigned the task of making the case for the Army—that is, I was like the prosecutor, if you will. These were trials that were held before a panel of judges. There was another officer who was assigned to be the representative of the accused. So you'd have to go interview somebody. Often you had to interview them at the stockade, the jail. Then they'd show up in front of the court at some point and there would be a trial, following rules not unlike the rules that apply in civil court. There was a manual called *The Uniform Code of Military Justice* which you had to be familiar with, rules of evidence, and all that. But they were tense situations, emotion-loaded situations, because for the young man involved—there weren't any women in the Army at that point—this was a serious business. He was going to get court-martialled and probably dishonorably discharged. He might be going to spend some time in jail.

Except for that experience, I had never had any other experience in my life of hard conflict of ideas and trying to get results. But you know, it was interesting. I would never have characterized the task force in those early years—any time, but certainly in the early years when it was so intense—as black or white, black versus white, or black against white. It wasn't that way. There was a spirit throughout it, I think, of "How can we together make this place change?" And that's kind of the way it evolved. I made a report to the faculty about the work of the task force. I made a number of reports in that first year. I reported to the Corporation and the Corporation Executive Committee. I reported to the faculty in April of 1969. That was the faculty meeting at which the

recommendations of the task force were presented and really accepted. The place began to change at that meeting. It was those things that evolved in that first six or eight months that led to the admission of forty-two blacks, I think, in the fall of 1969.

The largest class of black students ever to have been admitted to MIT at that time.

Yes. There had been about a dozen, eight or nine, the previous year. Fred Douglass Johnson was in that first group.

In that first year or two of that task force, there had to be a lot of things that you may not quite have understood either from the black students' views or from those of some of the administrators. Where did you go to try to get understanding of things when you misunderstood or felt puzzled? You know, I can just see you being puzzled about some things. How did you deal with that?

I talked to people, talked to a lot of people who had more understanding of these issues than I did. I talked a lot to Harold Isaacs, this fellow I mentioned who was a professor of political science. I talked to Frank Jones, I talked to Willard Johnson. I didn't know Jim Williams at that point. I don't think Jim was here. No, he wasn't here in '68. But Willard and Frank and Harold were people I talked with a lot. And I read a lot. Frank gave me a copy of *Souls of Black Folk*. I bought a lot of books. I read a lot of Baldwin, I read Ellison. I just tried to get myself educated on this.

When I mention names like Don Palmer, what comes to mind?

When you say Don Palmer, the word that immediately pops into my head is "puzzlement." I never understood Don. Don and I talked a lot, too.

He may have been the first black psychiatrist here.

Yes, he was. Don and I did talk a lot. There was a fellow, professor of physics, who am I trying to think of?

Jim Young?

Jim Young. Jim Young came here first as a visiting scientist, or a visiting professor maybe, and we talked. John Mims came in that same time. John was here in the fall of '68. He was on the task force. He and I talked a lot. I was in a situation where I had to try to learn as quickly as I could enough about the black experience in the United

States that I could be a more engaged and more understanding participant in this process.

Jim Bishop was here too, wasn't he?

Yes, Jim had just finished or was just finishing his graduate studies. I hired Jim in the spring of '68 to create and run the Interphase program.

When you look back now at that period, and you look at the people you conversed with, the readings, and so forth, what helped you the most? Was it people who helped you the most? Was it your reading that helped you get through this very tough period? On a lot of campuses at that time, people were completely split.

Oh yes, we saw it at Harvard, we saw it at Cornell, we saw it at Wesleyan. One of the things we did, a group of the task force members—Ken Wadleigh and Shirley and Jim and I, and I've forgotten who else—two carloads of us went down and spent a day at Wesleyan, talking with folks down there about their experience. I think I would say people helped the most. It was getting to know students in the BSU, getting to know the students who came here that summer in Interphase. I think I knew all of them personally by the end of the summer. You can learn a lot from books, but there's no substitute for getting to know people. That's where the learning comes from. I look back at this time and I say, this is probably the time in my life when for me personally the greatest growth and change and understanding of complicated problems occurred—greater than any other time. I even learned some silly things about running meetings, such as things go better if you feed people—at least at MIT, with MIT students. If you got something for people to eat, it would go better.

I may be wrong, if so correct me, but there was a special relationship that developed between you and Shirley Jackson. Can you talk a little bit about that? She was still a student, but that relationship has grown enormously over the years.

If you had to look back at the BSU in that first year and ask who was the central figure in bringing that group together, in shaping its plans and directions, and in speaking for it, it was Shirley. She was just the most articulate and the most thoughtful, displayed the most sense and good judgment—not to say other people did not, but she stood out for those qualities. I suppose it was natural that if I wanted to bring the group together at an unscheduled time to deal with something, the person I'd

go talk with about it would be Shirley. The person who would bring the students into the conversation was Shirley. She was clearly *primus inter pares*, first among equals, although never formally designated as such. The BSU in those years always worked hard at having co-chairs.

I suppose that's why the relationship developed beginning in 1968, and it just kept going. There were a couple of years there when she was away and I didn't see her at all. Part of the reason I think that the friendship with Shirley redeveloped when she returned to MIT, and began to be involved in MIT activities, was that she and Margaret MacVicar were such good friends. They were ... I was going to say they were classmates, but that isn't right. Margaret was ahead of her. She was '64, Shirley was '68. But they lived together in McCormick and they were close friends, and at that time I was working hand in glove with Margaret on the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. So that was a way of staying in touch with Shirley. I was formally the chair of the organization and she was—not formally, but certainly in everyone's mind and in the way that everybody treated her—the chair of the BSU, the leader of the BSU. It was just natural that we developed a close relationship. Shirley and I often disagreed about things, but there was never a question of doubting each other's integrity or having respect for each other. The respect never faltered.

You had to make some decisions about what kind of students could actually make it here during that period of time. You and the task force came up with the idea of trying to increase the number of black students here. You had to make some decisions. Now, you had to decide what we should do in terms of how many students we brought in and what kinds of students we would identify. Could you talk about what kinds of decisions were involved in that, and also when you look back at it, do you think there were some problems with the number of people you brought in who actually did not make it? Was it very painful for the institution to accept this failure?

When we talked, trying to get at the question of how to increase the number of black Americans here, it seemed obvious that there were two things that had to be done. One was we had to make more black youngsters—high-school youngsters—knowledgeable about MIT, interested in MIT, willing to apply to MIT. The other was we had to change the way we dealt with admissions.

You know generally what we did with respect to the first part of that problem. We got from the College Board the list of people who had identified themselves as black and who had scores which were in the range of what would make sense here. We generated materials and mailed to them. A lot of the students who were here in 1968–'69, that small number of black students, went out and did school visiting. That process alone increased the number of black applicants, my guess is, by a factor of between five and ten. The number of applicants just went up enormously. We had a much bigger pool to draw from. But it was also clear that we had to change the way we approached admissions.

Now, I've got to describe what has been my sense of the philosophy on which the admissions process has operated—operated then and operates now. The Institute gets a set of applications, completed applications, which I find it helpful to think of as broadly falling into three categories. There are a relatively small number, a few hundred students, who are obviously admissible. Anybody looking at the record, looking at the individual, would say “in”—and almost any college in the country would say the same thing. There is another set of folks—a larger number, maybe a thousand or so—that it doesn't take you very long to say “that student isn't going to survive here, that student shouldn't be admitted to MIT because they can't cut it.” Just based on their high-school record, you would come to the conclusion that you shouldn't admit them because they aren't going to make it.

Do you have a sense of what that is, in more detail?

Well, it has to do with grades, it has to do with board scores, it has to do with evidence of motivation, of energy, of doing things they aren't required to do—but for some set of folks you wouldn't have any difficulty getting agreement, “don't admit this person.” Then there's the large number—in those years we were getting three or four thousand applicants, now we get eight thousand applicants—the big group in the middle, which is probably three-quarters of the total that are palpably admissible. Some look more so than others, but you could make an argument that those folks ought to be admitted. We can't take them all. We're going to admit about two thousand. We admit all that few hundred that look like they're stars, like they clearly can do MIT. Then you look

at this big group and you say, “Okay, how do we now sort out in this process which one-sixth or one-third of these students—say there are now six thousand of them left—we're going to admit?” It was probably one-half in those years because we had a smaller applicant pool.

You try by this process of looking at personal stuff and academic stuff to admit the best qualified sub-set. That's the process. You admit the best qualified sub-set of the applicant pool. If we now took this larger pool of black applicants and ran them through that same process, we were going to filter a lot of them out because they had come from a different school setting and had had a different life experience—and we weren't so darn sure what best qualified meant there. So we said, “Okay, we're now going to look separately—separate admissions process—for the black applicants, and our task is not to admit the best qualified sub-set but our task is to admit everyone we think can make it at MIT.” That was how we described it. “We're going to admit every applicant who we think has a reasonable chance of making it here.”

Now, we were flying blind at that point. There was always in this group of black applicants a spectrum of preparation. You had some set of students who would have been admitted under the old rules and you had some students who probably shouldn't have applied. But you had a set of students who came from school backgrounds and who had, some of them, board scores that you didn't know what to make of. You didn't know whether they could make it here or not. So we were flying blind, we were taking pot-shots at it, and we did the best we could. We tried to learn from experience. Look at that first group, the class of '73. I don't remember, I knew it at one time, I knew it by heart, but I no longer remember what the graduation rate was. It sure wasn't seventy-five percent. I think we admitted some students at that point who would have been a lot better served if they had gone somewhere else. We ground them down. You found in that group students who just weren't ready to be in college. There are always students in the freshman class who aren't ready to be here, who aren't ready to settle down to serious work. But there were some students who were ready to go to college and ready to tackle this place, and we just couldn't give them the kind of support—or they didn't have the kind of background that made sense. So as time went on—class

of '73, class of '74—we tried to learn from that experience and refine that sense of who can make it here, but still following the same policy of admitting all the students we think can make it.

When you look at, say, two or three years later or even a little longer, we had a chance to do studies. I remember very vividly the young lady down in Admissions who used to look at the admission data and actually put together reports for you to give you some sense about how the students in question were doing at MIT. We began, I think, to make better choices based on those data in terms of the young people who stood a chance of being able to make it here. But it turned out that we couldn't always tell the difference between those who looked like everybody else and those who we thought were at risk, but yet we still were willing to take the chance. Where do you think some of the issues are there?

The conundrum, a problem that selective colleges and universities all wrestle with, is that they are pretty good at predicting success, predicting who will succeed, but they are pretty bad at predicting who will fail. If you ask anybody who is in the statistical side of admissions about that, that's what they'll tell you. It was at that line between success and failure that we were trying to establish thresholds, we were trying to establish understanding. Before the woman in Admissions—a succession of women in Admissions—worked on this, I had a graduate student who worked on it with me: Ken Schoman. Ken was looking at all the data that were available to try and help us discriminate between students who couldn't make it here and students who could. He could predict who was going to be able to breeze through MIT, for the most part. But there were two classes of students that there was just no way to distinguish, there were no discriminators. Those were the students that we thought were going to make it who turned out not to and the students we thought were on the ragged edge who turned out to be stars. I've never been a strong believer in statistics, but that experience strengthened my disbelief. You know the folks around here. Jim Gates was somebody who on the record, when he arrived at MIT, was likely to be hanging on by his fingernails, and he's turned out to be a star. He was evidently a star when he was here.

What about the possible issues related to environment as well?

Yes. Well, when I said we were flying blind, we knew there were environmental differences here but we didn't know how to relate them, we didn't know how to take them into account.

Before 1968, the MIT faculty and the Admissions Office were very much involved with visiting predominantly black institutions. In 1964, 46 predominantly black schools were visited by MIT faculty and Admissions Office staff. Do you have any sense about that? That was before Martin Luther King was killed. The institution was thinking about this issue before that time. We seem to have been a little bit ahead of some of the other institutions. Do you have any sense about that period of time? There was a report that was issued by the faculty Ad-Hoc Committee on Academic Opportunity appointed by the president. This is May 1965. Ron McLaughlin, the black professor in civil engineering, served on that committee. He was here before Willard Johnson was.

Yes, he was. He was only here a few years. He went off to create a company.

That's right, yes. He was on a Committee on Academic Opportunity here, and this report called for some of the same programs as the Admissions and Financial Aid Committees earlier had called for.

I think both Roland Greeley and Pete Richardson were acutely conscious of the fact that there was no reason to be anything but dismayed about the fact that there were half a dozen black Americans in each admitted class. That was not satisfactory. I don't know, I'm guessing now, but what had to be done to change that was that one had to be differentially aggressive in recruiting black applicants and one had to change admissions. Whether they didn't feel they had the authority to do that, or they were timid about doing it, I don't know, but they were clearly trying to get out and spread the word in predominantly black schools. Shirley Jackson came as a result of a school visit. I did school visiting in Houston and in suburban Washington—Virginia suburbs of Washington—in the early '60s. I saw black students there. But nothing changed here until we changed the way the Admissions Office dealt with it.

There are two other people who were involved in the task force early on that need to be mentioned because they were important to it. One was Dick Adler, in electrical engineering. Dick was a member from the earliest times. I knew him from 1950 until his death, and he had

always this capacity to be able to listen to a conversation and pick out the key issues and focus on them. He was very useful in that respect on the task force. The other was Al Hill. Now, I'm not sure that Al was involved at the very beginning, but Al was certainly involved in the physics department as deputy head of the physics department—in recruiting black graduate students. That's how Jim Turner got here, I believe. I think he was recruited by Al. As I say, I don't know that Al was involved in the fall of '68, but he soon afterwards became involved and, as you know, he was critical. It was his conception of the task force—or a group or committee which he headed—that led to the creation of the OME, right?

Talk just a little bit about that period, where essentially the task force developed the framework for what we are doing now and have been doing for probably twenty or thirty years.

It was essentially volunteers. I got volunteered by the president; other people we just kind of picked up as they expressed interest and as we thought they had something to contribute. The just-emerging BSU in the fall of 1968 decided on who was going to be representative for the black student community.

The first questions that the task force undertook in 1968 to 1969 were those that related to increasing the flow of minority applicants. I say minority, of course, but at that time the focus was exclusively on African-Americans. It focused at first on increasing the flow of applicants and then on how the admissions process should be construed in order to raise the probability of admissions from that. It also focused on student aid, recognizing that the aid question would be even more of a determinant of admission for most of these youngsters than it was for the average kid at MIT. I think I told you about the dispute, the sort of non-dispute, that went on for two or three months, in which when the BSU folks said, "We want full scholarship," I assumed, and all my colleagues on the other side of the table assumed, so to speak, that that meant scholarship right up to full student cost. Actually, what was meant was all scholarship up to need, no loan. Once we got our collective heads straight on that one we easily got by it. That was the only issue, I think, in which there was a genuine, long-lasting misunderstanding.

We did then what we really still do to increase the flow of applicants, that is, we send material by mail to all those high-school students who have taken the SAT's who at that time indicated that they were African-American—now other minorities are included—and who have scores in the range that at MIT might make sense. A little brochure went out that first year that was produced by the task force, or that certainly was approved by the task force, and resulted in sort of a ten-fold increase in the number of minority applicants. That's been the core of the effort ever since. It was supplemented in those early years—and is still supplemented to some degree—by school visiting in schools where minority populations were very high. A number of the student members of the task force, and other students not involved in the task force but involved with the BSU, went off themselves on school visiting trips during that first year.

We talked a little earlier about the admissions issue. I tried to reflect it in these terms, that there is a group of students among the applicants who no one would have any trouble deciding they were admissible; there's a smaller group of students who most folks would agree right off the bat are not admissible and should never have been encouraged to apply; and then there's that large group of people in the middle, most of whom are probable candidates and could probably make it at MIT, but you can only admit about a third of them because of the limits on the class size. Our view up to then had been that we should go through that process in a way in which we admitted what seemed to the admissions staff, to admissions readers, and to the faculty who were involved in the process the most qualified subset out of that big middle group. So you would get that class size you wanted. The change we made—which in essence has been present ever since, although I think the distinctions have decreased over the twenty-five years we're talking about, more than twenty-five years—was to say we will separate out the minority applicants and the question we will ask of that group is not, "Which is the best qualified subset?" but "Which is the subset who by all we know and can learn look like they can make it at MIT, and we will admit them." That led to forty-eight or forty-nine black students in the class of 1973, the class that was admitted in 1969.

Now that issue of who can make it, who do we think can make it, of course, was highly subjective at the outset. We were working in a complete vacuum in terms of knowledge about how students with scores in these ranges, and from schools that we largely had not had applicants from before, would perform here. I think we probably made some mistakes in those years. I *know* we made some mistakes in those years. We admitted young men and women who would have been better served by going to a place which was less demanding. We also got some great surprises in that time, in the sense that people who looked just like ones who didn't make it turned out to be real stars, academic stars. It just increases one's skepticism about the admissions tradition.

One of the things that task force did—or at least encouraged me to do—in those early years was to analyze as best we could the results that began to accumulate as people went through in the early 1970s to see if we could improve our admissions process at all, improve the selection rules. We worked hard at that. There were two graduate students in Sloan who worked with me on it for a few years. Jim Taylor was one of those. The other was Kenneth Schoman. He worked for a long time in the student affairs office in the early 1970s. He worked on it for a while. Then someone in the admissions office in the middle 1970s began to pick up that responsibility. It's not surprising as we look back on it, I think, that we learned that there was no statistical approach that was going to give you any better assessment.

Is there anything you can think of, in examining or analyzing the data, that you recall as being very important things that you could review and actually begin to evaluate who should come and who should not come?

The most important, the most statistically useful, the most valid indicators were the same ones, not surprisingly, that had emerged as the most significant in the previous twenty years. Rank in class, number one; grades in math and science, number two; and achievement test scores particularly in the quantitative areas, science and mathematics, number three. All that's on the quantitative side, that you can measure. On the more subjective side, the same things that have always seemed to matter for students who do well here. It has to do with: Is this a young person who does more than he or she is required to do? Is this somebody who shows real motivation for a science-based career? Is this

somebody who has given some evidence of leadership in what they have done? Those qualities that have always been and still are important. It's how accurately you can assess them. Do you have the data in the comments that come from teachers and guidance counselors and all the rest to enable you to assess that?

When did the task force cease to exist? I don't know, some time in the early to middle 1970s. A couple of other things that it did were important. The task force responded to the initiatives of the BSU in creating the Black Students' Lounge, the BSU Lounge in Walker Memorial. It created a course which was offered, I think, for the first time in 1969 or 1970. There were a lot of guest lecturers who came in. I have forgotten who was in charge of the course. It was in what was then the Department of Humanities. Humanities was then one department; it wasn't divided into sections. There was a course offered that first year in which guests were invited to come in. The purpose was to talk about black history and culture. That course was taught for a few years and then there began to be more offerings in the humanities area. I don't think that course survived. It was offered for the first time in 1969 or 1970. That was a product of the BSU. Arrangements were made for upper-class students who wished to do so to be paid to be tutors, to spend time to be available as tutors, the BSU tutoring program. There was a young woman who was so effective in making that work. Her mother subsequently worked here in the dean's office.

Inez Hope.

Yes, Inez Hope. She made all the difference in that first couple of years in making that tutoring program. She's got pluck.

Maybe the most important thing that the task force did in those early years was to put in place the commission that Al Hill chaired. The most important thing, I think, that commission did was to study the circumstances then, after about four years of experience with larger numbers of at that point still mostly black students at MIT, to study that experience and say what more the Institute could do to help. Out of that grew the program that Wes Harris was the first director of, the Office of Minority Education, OME. OME was created, in effect, by that task force. That, I think, was maybe the most important thing that the task force did. It was Al Hill's group that did it, but we put it

in place. I should also say that in that first year we invented Interphase, Project Interphase.

What year, 1968?

1968–1969, yes, correct. John Mims was instrumental in that. In fact, the name “Interphase” is John’s creation. We kept running around in circles trying to figure out what we were going to call this thing, and John came up with that idea. That was a time in which we recruited Jim Bishop to lead that. Jim was just finishing a Ph.D. program here in chemistry. He came to work for me to create that program. We included Francis O’Brien over in the athletic department to run the social and athletic portion of it. We recruited a number of teachers, some of them folks like Shirley Jackson who had been involved in the task force. We ran Interphase for the first time in the summer of 1969. All of us had our hearts in our throats when those forty-something youngsters arrived.

That was a major stroke for the institution. We have to look at the period in which this was taking place and the institution—in terms of faculty especially, I suspect—was not all in tune with doing these kinds of things. I have heard that you had to stand tall on a lot of issues. I guess my question is, what kind of backlash did you have to deal with? I understand that could have been the case.

There was certainly some backlash, I’m sure, but most of it was not expressed. In that first year, the 1969–’70 year, I made presentations to everybody in sight. It sort of started with the Committee on Educational Policy, where we had to get approval for Interphase; I made a presentation to the Corporation; some time in that year, I made a presentation to the executive committee of the Corporation; I made a couple of presentations at faculty meetings. The one that sticks in my mind was in April of 1969. We had a faculty meeting where the majority of the agenda was devoted to a report from the task force, which I participated in but didn’t carry myself. Some students were involved with it as well. It was the first time that the faculty at large had had an opportunity to hear in some detail about what we were doing and what was coming. There was no expressed backlash or expressed opposition. There were questions raised, to be sure. Are we doing the right thing here? The question that is hardest to answer—was hardest to answer then, is hardest for me to answer now—is, Are you putting a set of young people, those who turn out to really struggle at MIT, in a

circumstance which is going to do more harm than it’s going to do good? I mean, are you going to do damage? Are you going to grind people down? I still worry about that.

I started out with a group of sixteen sophomores five years ago in EE as their faculty advisor. I’m just seeing most of them through now. They got their M.Eng. degrees this past June. Now in that group of sixteen, there were four black students. One finished up with a bachelor’s degree in four years—struggled at the beginning, but did okay and finished up. I don’t know what he’s doing now. One went out of here this year with flying colors—a spectacular student. Neither of the other two is here now. One has been away for about a year. He was asked to withdraw for academic reasons and the other has been here this year but is not yet registered. He has done a whole year’s worth of work without being registered. He was in serious difficulty for the first three years he was here. I have no doubt about one student. Another student had personal problems, family problems that distracted him. I guess I don’t have a lot of doubt about the other student either. He’s a bright guy if he sets his mind to it. But every once in a while along the way, I wondered if we had done these folks a favor—two students, in particular.

If questions were raised in those early years, they were raised in a spirit not of opposition or backlash but in a spirit of honest questioning that you are admitting now students who would not have been admitted previously, which was certainly the case. Not for all, but for some. Are you putting more stress on them than they should be exposed to? I mean, an aspect of this that I’ve had to keep saying for thirty years—and say it whenever I get a chance—is, “You should not look at the whole minority cohort at MIT and say they got here under special circumstances.” The fact that we reached out to produce more applications would have meant that we would have admitted more minority students even if we hadn’t changed the admissions process. We were producing more applicants. My guess is that if we hadn’t changed the admissions process we wouldn’t have had forty-eight students in the fall of 1969. We might have had twenty or twenty-five. There was a tendency—there is always a tendency—to look at that group as if it’s a homogeneous cohort and it isn’t. It covered a whole spectrum in terms of expressed intellectual capacity. I mean, some of

them are by anybody's measure outstanding students. Others plod along, as some other kids plod along. I wrote to one student last month after graduation and told him that I wanted to say to him what I've been saying to others who had asked me about him for the past year, and that is that in my experience at MIT over forty years with lots of students he is one of the top ten in terms of his promise and his combination of personal and intellectual skills. I said, "I see in you the seeds of greatness and I want to know what you do with your life as long as I live." He was a super student.

And you've seen a lot of students.

I've seen a lot of students. But again we're getting here into some of the issues that have been and continue to be raised about, broadly put, affirmative action and, more narrowly put, about what we do at MIT. We have to keep saying that you can't think of African-Americans or Hispanics or Native Americans or Asian-Americans as a homogeneous group. They have all the natural human variability that the rest of the population has. They should not all be tagged with the same label of "Well, they were admitted because MIT had a special program."

Again, when we look at, say, your role at MIT during the period when you were chancellor down to 1980, when you became the president, can you identify any of the milestones as chancellor? You were the day-to-day person. The presidential position was almost split up, whereby you were the day-to-day person and Jerry Wiesner was very much involved in the campaign to get funds and so forth.

The campaign started in 1975. From 1975 to 1980, Jerry spent a lot of his time outside.

You actually were running the institution on a daily basis.

On a daily basis.

Now, during that particular period before you became president, can you recall any significant events or programs or decision-making process as it relates to the whole issue of affirmative action, increasing the number of black faculty and administrators?

Well, it was during that period, during the 1970s, that the federal government was getting much more involved in a regulatory reporting way with universities on aspects of affirmative action. That is, we were getting much more formal in the prepa-

ration of affirmative action plans, in the reporting of data, in field reviews by federal bureaucrats—I don't know whether it was the Department of Labor at that point or the Department of Education, it doesn't matter—who were coming to see how we were doing. I remember with great clarity a meeting. I don't know whether you were present or not. I know Mary Rowe was present. She has reminded me about it; she says it's the only time she ever saw me lose my temper. There was some bureaucrat from somewhere in the government who was giving us hell because we didn't have a separate affirmative action plan for the Lincoln Laboratory.

I remember that.

We sat around down there in the president's conference room and I explained to her six ways from Sunday that the Lincoln Laboratory doesn't have a separate plan because it's part of MIT, it's part of corporate MIT. She kept coming back to it, "But it's a separate organization." Finally, I lost my temper. I spent a lot of time in those years dealing with those issues inside and outside—outside in the sense of dealing with people here, I never dealt with them in Washington or the regional offices. I guess I did one time in the 1970s go to the Boston regional office for a discussion—you went with me—about our affirmative action plan. I regarded much of that activity as non-productive. All the time we spent on collecting historical data and compiling statistics and writing a certain amount of boiler-plate was not helping us get on with the task. That satisfied the feds with their urge for uniformity, but I don't think it helped us much. It was fortunate in those years that Jerry Wiesner had a very long history of commitment to the civil rights movement and to greater opportunity for minorities. Jerry had been deeply involved in the civil rights movement when he was in the White House in Washington with John F. Kennedy. He came back here and got involved in a variety of activities in Roxbury. Ruth Batson and Jerry were bosom buddies, had been for a long time. The fellow who was the first president of Roxbury Community College—he worked at MIT during the war. He was well known on the black scene in Boston: Parks, Paul Parks.

He has been very much involved with almost all the activities around here.

Yes. Jerry had known all those people for years. Even before he went off to Washington, he had been close to them and was deeply, deeply committed to changing MIT. If that had not been the case, not a lot would have happened around here, I'm afraid, in the 1970s. I couldn't have driven it as chancellor. The president had to be supportive. If you look back at the record, you'll find that it's the decade of the 1970s when most of the expansion around here in female faculty occurred. There was some considerable expansion in black faculty as well. A lot of it turned out to be kind of transient in the sense that people came and people went. I think at the end of the 1970s it was a disappointment for all of us that we didn't have many more black faculty than we had in 1971. But Jerry drove a lot of that, particularly the changes in the faculty. I don't know whether this set the stage for the big increases, the substantial increases in the female and minority enrollments in the 1980s.

Now, it's your feeling, when you look back at the period of the 1970s and 1980s, that in the 1970s we got a push from the federal government in a way to kind of structure things. We made some progress, but then it's your feeling that basically a lot of it was not all that good. We did better, but then in the 1980s we didn't make any major progress.

We didn't make much progress, on the faculty side. We continued to make progress on the student side.

That's where we actually kept a steady pace. But what do you think happened about our inability to increase the numbers of minorities on the faculty?

If you look at the data about African-American Ph.D. production all through the 1970s and into the 1980s—and I must say I'm not familiar with roughly the last ten years—it was going up in the aggregate. The published number of Ph.D's awarded to black Americans was going up, but if you looked at it in detail much of that was in other fields. It was in sociology or it was in education. The numbers in engineering and science did not go up a lot. My recollection is that they were in the range of one percent throughout that whole time. My belief for why we didn't do better on the faculty side is that we were looking at a pool which was not growing through the 1970s at a time when the institutions at this place were expanding, growing their faculties. We were all fishing in the same small pool. We were all looking

for the same set of outstanding folks, and we didn't make much progress on it.

Let me challenge you just a little bit on that. Although this is in the 1980s, when you were president, when we look at that ten-year period I remember a meeting we had. There was a question that came up in the Academic Council. We were trying to look at how we had done relative to graduating our own Ph.D's. It may have been Walter Rosenblith and Jerry, and you were the chancellor. Walter asked the Graduate School office and John Turner to take a look at all the black students who were coming out with their Ph.D's. We had at that time something like ten or twelve people coming out. Walter asked that they be looked at carefully. Somebody went to each of the department heads to get an assessment of each graduating student. The report came back to the Academic Council that none of the graduating Ph.D. black students were faculty quality. Do you have any sense of that?

I remember that, and I think it was in the 1970s.

It was in the 1970s, that's right. That is somewhat still the case, but if you look at that period, what do you think of that?

Well, maybe there are three things you could say about it. The simplest answer is that in thirty percent of MIT, in the School of Science, there is this longstanding policy that they wouldn't hire their own Ph.D's. They might take them back if they had gone off somewhere and done a good postdoc somewhere else, but they wouldn't hire them straight out of graduate school. There's no such compulsion in the School of Engineering. Through the 1980s, we were in a period in which the number of hires across the board—not just science and engineering, but across the board—was declining fairly rapidly. The faculty was no longer growing. Faculty growth stopped some time in the 1970s. The faculty was aging and the number of junior positions that were open within tight budget constraints was not very large. The data are available about the number of hires at the entry level over that period. I think you'll find that they were going down, steadily. We weren't hiring as many.

I guess the last thing to say about it is that in terms of faculty hiring, faculty appointments, the place is awfully selective. One wants to fill those positions with the best people it can find. Not every Ph.D. who comes out of here is going to have what it takes to get appointed to this faculty.

That's true regardless of race. It's probably true at all the places that we think of as our peers.

If you look at becoming president in 1980, if you look over your tenure there, what were the tough decisions that you made?

You know, you're not the first person who has asked that question. I have generally resisted answering on the grounds that the history ought not to be written by the people who made it. It ought to be written by somebody who's more objective. I'll make some comments on it. The 1980s were a period of significant belt-tightening for MIT. We took a big five percent whack at the budgets in the early 1980s, Francis Low and I did. That was a major undertaking—not easy to do, not nearly as hard to do as what Vest is trying to do right now, reengineering. We did one of those in the 1970s as well. I did one when I was chancellor, and we had taken out an awful lot of the slack.

One of the more difficult things that got done in the 1980s—and I think has already proven to be important and will continue to be significant in the life of the place—was the affiliation with the Whitehead Institute. You will remember that there was opposition in the faculty. There was some opposition in the Corporation. All those awful nightmares that had to do with why we shouldn't do it, none of them ever came to pass. The Whitehead has been spectacularly successful, entirely because David Baltimore insisted on being extremely selective in who he brought into the place. It has improved and expanded biology—biology graduate education and biology education generally at MIT. It's a great thing. It was hard for the Institute to do. Francis Low and I put an awful lot of effort into it.

The last part of the 1980s for me, from 1986 on, was pretty well occupied with the campaign. As had happened in the 1970s when I was running the school and Jerry was raising money, I was raising money and John Deutch was running the school. One of the events in the 1980s that will always be on my mind as something that on the whole we did not handle terribly well—and that for me became a kind of overriding concern toward the end—was the disagreement over South Africa investment and all that. When I say we didn't handle it awfully well, I don't mean that I think we made the wrong judgment in policy, but the fact that it became in the last couple of years

of my presidency an issue which mobilized an awful lot of students. That protest got pretty high-tension at times. Somehow I think we could have done that better, could have handled that better, could have avoided that. I felt by the time I left that office in 1990 that the students had succeeded in personalizing that whole issue in a way which focused exclusively on me. I didn't like it very damn much. That was tough. It hurt to be regarded as the enemy by even that relatively small set of students.

There was a young man I think about quite frequently who played such a major role in that attack. I can't think of his name. He was a black student. You know exactly who I'm talking about.

Exactly.

He was relentless in his negative comments and the things that he would do to the administration.

Yes, he had a kind of mean streak. There was another. There were two. He could still be around for all I know. He was a graduate student.

So there are two things I mentioned about that period—one that I regard as a substantial accomplishment and the other as a significant failure in some sense. I think we managed in those years to bring some very good people to MIT, both in the faculty and in the administration.

For example.

Well, Nan Friedlaender in the administration as dean. Ellen Harris toward the end of my term—a year and a half before the end, a strong appointment. Jean de Monchaux. John Deutch. I appointed John dean of science and provost. I have no regrets about either one. Gerry Wilson. These are all appointments I made.

Is it not true that it would have delighted you if John had taken your place as President of MIT?

That's true, yes. I understood, I think, why the Corporation, why the search committee came to the conclusion it did. You will remember that another failure in that time related to the applied biological sciences. Not the judgment to eliminate it—I still think the judgment was right—but the way it was handled. All of that got laid, quite unfairly in my view, on John Deutch. He was seen as the hatchet man who made it happen. It was not his judgment alone. It was a judgment that he and I made together. I bear as much of the responsibility for that as he did. We relied on others to imple-

ment it, and that was where we got in trouble. We should have played more of a role ourselves in the implementation. But in any case, that happened in 1988, maybe, 1987 or 1988? That set of folks who were so upset about that decision and the way it was handled blamed John for all of it. All that anger and animosity came to roost when they were looking for my successor.

It was bad enough that it came to roost here, but it came to roost in other places too. John had been told by the chairman of the committee at another university which I'm not going to name—but a major research university—that he was going to get the nod to be president. People around here who had been closed to Deutch at MIT began calling their colleagues there, and they killed it. I thought that was dirty pool. John is the most able, most creative academic administrator I know, I've ever known. I think he would have made a good president for MIT. I'm not saying that I'm disappointed with what we've got. I think Chuck Vest has brought enormous capacity and strength to that job, but John would have been a good president, too.

It's interesting, I was talking to Shirley McBay two weeks ago in Washington. She says the same thing about John. She says he's probably the brightest guy she's ever worked with, just a super-bright guy.

But you know brightness, intelligence, sheer intelligence, intellectual capacity doesn't always go with administrative skill. John had them both, has them both.

What's the difference? How do you see the difference?

Well, there are an awful lot of bright people around this place who you wouldn't want to organize a three-car funeral. They don't have that capacity to relate to people, to get people to work together, to focus on a mission, and to get the job done. John does. That's what I mean. I mean, the ability to manage, to lead people is not necessarily synonymous with smarts, with brightness, with intelligence. You *need* that, it's necessary, but not sufficient. John had it all, has it all. I don't want to put it in the past tense. I look forward to his return. He says he wants to come back to MIT, and I hope he does. Shirley and John struck a lot of sparks, but there was a great deal of mutual respect.

When you look at that period of your presidency, you had a number of very good sessions and some heated sessions with groups of black faculty members. You met with them a lot, individually as well as as a group. Any highlights you can think about in that regard?

Well, there are some awfully good friendships forged there. I knew Willard Johnson long before 1968. Willard and I became much closer during that time. The same is true of Jim Young. There were some disappointments, enormous disappointments in there. John Turner was one of them—you know, the manner in which it happened, the reasons it happened. You've got to be always sad about a situation where you feel like you have a lot of confidence in and trust somebody and then find that your trust was not well placed. Frank Jones and I knew each other before 1968. We spent a lot of time together, one-on-one time. All through this period, Frank tried to help me understand what the needs were. I look back on those meetings—which we had fairly regularly during the early 1980s and in the 1970s, and which we did not continue at that pace in the later 1980s—and think that that group probably got disappointed with me in some sense because we didn't make much progress, didn't make any tangible progress in black faculty in that decade.

If you reflect on that period too, now that you mention it, OME became an issue at one point. I think you met with almost all of the senior faculty members at that time trying to see if one of them would take the office of OME and continue to work on it. Without giving the names, what were some of the things that surprised you? You never were able to get anyone to take it.

It disappointed me greatly that no one would step up to that, it really did. There was one of those fellows in particular, whom I shall leave nameless, who not only wouldn't do it but brushed me off in a way that I thought was just contemptible. OME mattered around here. It was important. I just could not understand, found it hard to understand, why members of this faculty who had seen it come into being and who knew something about its history and its significance weren't prepared to dedicate a few years to it. I wasn't looking for somebody to lead it for life, but somebody to head it for a few years as it was developing. As you know, we then eventually had to turn to staff folks as leaders, for the most part. Art Smith led it for a year or two.

That's right, yes. I took over after him. The office never was the same. Wes Harris had taken it and developed it to a certain point. We look back at it now and it hasn't changed.

There has been too much turnover.

We knew that that office was going to be successful to the extent that it made a difference at least in this kind of environment. But it had to be a faculty type to provide leadership. When you think about it, there could have been points of OME—that was one—where we were trying to get someone to continue the work that Wes had done or continue as a faculty type to lead the shop. I know you talked to each and every one to sort of get their feelings.

One thing that struck me in that period, in the 1980s, and still puzzles me, is in that group of fewer than twenty people there were some animosities and antagonisms that I've just never understood.

Well, that's right. I think that's one of the disadvantages of having such a small number of people who are seen in many cases as a whole, as a group, and therefore are seen as people who are supposed to act alike.

There's an assumption of solidarity, which is unreasonable. I mean, people are going to differ in their views on lots of things.

And the smaller the group, with that kind of false concept, it makes it even worse because it puts the pressure on those individuals in such a way that they even act up worse than they would normally. I think you're seeing that. That's why it's just so important to try and get a larger number. If you look at the student category, you really can understand. They are respected, one by the other. But it's hard when there are less than twenty faculty members and administrators probably, when you put them all together. It was not a pleasant period. I'm trying to figure out what made it so unpleasant. Was it the time, or what? That was a tough period.

Everybody involved in these issues was disappointed. I mean, that's part of the reason. It's a sense of failure, a sense of disappointment that we hadn't made greater progress. There's more to it than that. As I said at the outset, I don't understand it—why it got so scratchy, so unpleasant. It was not a good time.

I think part of it also was that we weren't making any progress.

Yes, that's what I mean by disappointment. There was no progress being made. People had commit-

ted to it, felt committed to it, felt they had invested themselves in progress—and it wasn't happening.

We also had a lot of resistance there from departments. People really resisted. Ideas and concepts, excellent kinds of processes that we could use, were passed on to the academic departments.

Some of them acted and some didn't. I remember a meeting at a faculty council in the spring of 1969, back before this time. I was making a presentation to the council that had to do with faculty appointments, affirmative action in faculty. We were going over the timetable. It was the first time we had been asked to come up with goals and a timetable. Lots of us had talked about this. It had been a subject of discussion at Academic Council. But in my naiveté, Jerry's naiveté—Howard Johnson's naiveté, Howard was president then—I suggested that we ought to set a goal of thirty black faculty in the next two years. We got thirty by saying it ought to be one per department—and for the larger departments, two. There was a department head there in the front row. This was out at Endicott House. We were sitting in that living room out at Endicott House. There was a head of a major department there, who is now long dead. He said, "Would it count if I put on black-face?" There was a sort of uncomfortable silence in the room. Nobody wanted to say anything. Some people, I suppose, wanted to laugh. Some people wanted to say, "Go to hell." And the moment passed.

That was 1969. Nobody would make that comment in 1985, but there were still some people in positions of leadership in departments who felt that way.

Your department, electrical engineering, was one of the real leaders, has always been a leading department. I'm not sure, but I don't remember them doing all that well on minority faculty.

No, they didn't do all that well. They still haven't done all that well. And it's not just our department.

In fact, one of the black faculty members who I think was there at the time, during the 1980s, had to actually get a lawyer from the outside to fight his case. Yes. You had to set up a committee through Francis Low to look at his case. Do you remember that?

Yes, I remember that. I remember it well. One of the members of the faculty in that department, who was skeptical about the wisdom of making

that tenure appointment, was Richard Adler, whose judgment and views I have always had a great respect for. I'm not close enough to the department now to know whether that was the right judgment or not.

I don't know, but it's an interesting phenomenon. I think we also had another one in that department—I thought, from a distance—who eventually went to the University of Chicago. He's doing exceedingly well. That's Raphael Lee.

Yes. I saw Raphael a couple of years ago at an alumni meeting in Chicago. He is doing very well. Now, I think he could have stayed here if he wanted to, couldn't he?

No. The word was he wasn't good enough. I think there may have been some other things underneath there, but the decision was not understood well by the medical community—key people in the arena where he did his research, at Mass. General and other key medical centers in the Boston area. There were definitely some issues in the department in terms of why he was not able to stay. When you're in the president's office, you are unable to exercise any influence at the time when the judgments are being made on the things that later often blow up in your face. They're happening at some sub-level in a department, which could be a big department. I couldn't begin to list the number of cases in which Francis Low and I or John Deutch and I were involved in trying to deal with a serious problem after it had blown up—blown up to the extent we were being sued or dealing with some outside agency about it. These were not all ones that affected minority faculty, by any means. Many of them affected women faculty. When you looked at it, you came to the conclusion that the thing had gone off the track six months or a year before in some departmental committee which had screwed up in the way it did the work. From then on, it was all downhill. By the time it got to the president's office, you were dealing with an awful lot of bad history.

Well, that's a very important point. I always felt, particularly in some of the cases that I would bring to you, that that's what many people do not understand. Being the president of a university, a lot of people from outside that office seem to think that this person has this global power to deal with things. In a university, particularly the kind of research institution we have here, it's a whole different thing that one has to look at sitting behind that desk as

president when something involved with faculty comes up. Could you talk a little bit about how one thinks about that?

The most important understanding, I think, that you have to have if you're involved as president or provost or dean or department head or any kind of manager on the academic side at a place like this—a research university—is that the task is not to direct in any sense of that word, direct the intellectual directions that the institution takes or the choices that the faculty make about programs or research activities. Rather, your task is to provide an environment in which the members of the faculty can exercise their intellect, their free judgment, and make the choices themselves about how the place is going to develop. I've found myself a lot as president responding to the sort of question, "Well, where are you going to take the Institute in the next few years? What areas are going to grow, what areas are going to trail, how's the emphasis going to change?" That's a question that the president can answer only after the fact because you rely on the faculty, with their own instincts and sense of what's important, to make those judgments and to move. It doesn't move rapidly, it moves like a glacier, but it changes and the changes reflect the intellectual judgment of the faculty.

That's the way it has to be, I think, in a university. In a corporation, a profit-making corporation, the president says "Do this!" and everybody salutes and says "Yes, sir!" In a university, the president says "Do this!" and everybody says "Why?" It's very different. That was not news to me when I became president because I had been involved with Jerry for all those ten years and saw it there. Jerry put it very well early in his presidency. Someone said, "What's it like?" I was with him, in his office. He said, "You know, before I came into this job"—and this is a man who had been provost for five years—"before I came into this job, I thought that being president of MIT would be like being the skipper of a marvelous racing yacht. I could give a command and the crew would do it and we'd sail along just fine. When I got here, I found it was more like going down the Colorado River in a rubber raft." Pretty good metaphor. You don't manage, you don't lead, you don't function as president in a place like this by telling people what to do. If you want to lead the place in a certain direction in which you think it ought to evolve in a certain way, you have to start at the grass roots by

talking about that and hope that eventually there will come along some enthusiasm for it.

Now, I tried an aspect of that when I became president, and really failed. You remember at the inauguration I talked about pace and pressure, turning down the pace a little, turning back the throttle. People heard that, but neither faculty nor many students thought that was a very good idea. And it didn't happen; it really didn't happen. Now people say, "Well, you shouldn't think you failed at that because it might have been even worse if you hadn't tried." That may be the case, but you don't produce change in a place like MIT by saying, "We ought to change for these reasons—follow me." You produce it at best by encouraging at the grass-roots-level people to think about change and possible new directions. Maybe you'll move that way.

George Shultz, when he retired from the State Department, was interviewed by somebody from MIT, one of the people in the News Office. The interviewer said, "Dr. Shultz, you've been dean at Chicago and you were president of the Bechtel Company and you were Secretary of State. What's it like to be a leader in three different settings?" George put it all together in one sentence. He said, he discovered that in industry you had to be careful when you told someone to do something because the chances were very high they would; in government you didn't have to worry about that; and in academe you weren't supposed to tell anybody to do anything. It's an exaggeration, but there's a lot of truth in it. If you come in as president—as John Silber did twenty-nine years ago, twenty-seven years ago—to an institution which is about to go down the tubes, about to fail, then you can exercise a kind of imperial presidency as John did for most of the last twenty-seven years because there's nobody to push back, there are very few people to push back. He turfed out a lot of faculty, he brought in some new people, some good people. He made great change there. He increased the endowment by an order of magnitude. He got the budget balanced, he increased the student enrollment, he increased the quality of the students. If you're in that kind of a setting, you can be imperial about it. You can't be imperial at MIT or at Harvard or CalTech or any of those places you would think of as our peers. You saw what happened at Yale with Benno Schmidt, when he tried to be a little imperial

about it. They rejected him. Three years I think he was president.

What did Constantine Simonides mean to you?

Constantine was my closest male friend and had been for a long time. I didn't know Constantine when he worked in the Sloan School. I didn't know him until he came to work for Howard Johnson, when Howard became president in 1966. The sort of experiences that bonded us, in some sense, was all the uproar around the Vietnam war. Constantine and Jim Culliton and I, we lived together. Constantine and I lived together for two weeks in one of those MIT apartments at the top of Eastgate at the height of the uproar in 1969. There wasn't time to go home. We became very close friends.

You may have heard me say that one of the difficulties of being chief executive officer in any organization is that everyone inside the institution is accountable to you in some way, directly or indirectly; there is no one within the institution that you can really share your deepest worries and concerns with. You've got to find somebody outside the institution to do that. At MIT, having a chairman who knows the place was a great advantage to me. I relied a lot both on Howard Johnson and on David Saxon, and I think Chuck Vest has relied to some degree on me in the same way. Constantine was the exception to that because we had kind of grown up together. He was somebody I could talk with about almost anything. I knew that I could get an honest opinion from him and that if there was something that shouldn't be shared with others, it wouldn't be shared with others. When Chuck called me that Sunday to tell me Constantine had died—I was out in California about to speak to an alumni meeting—it was an awful, awful moment. He was my closest male friend.

I knew the two of you were very close. I know from my working with him, and watching the two of you work, it was obvious to me that he was very special to you. You consulted him a lot about major decisions.

About anything. It was always important to hear Constantine out. You may in the end decide to disagree with him, but he brought something to the problem. He knew the place so well. Everybody around here knew him. You hear this now, two years after his death. Someone in this office, who has gone through a very difficult time in the

last months, said to me this morning, “Well, none of this would have happened if Constantine had been here.” He was probably right, because it was in his area of responsibility and he wouldn’t have let it happen. He would have understood it at some gut level and sorted it out. He was an amazing man.

He was. I learned a lot from him in terms of just how to work. He could work, work, work. He could produce. I can’t imagine having someone working for you like Constantine. If you needed something, the next morning—if it took all night—he’d have it for you.

Yes. In a way, Constantine’s finest hour around here was sorting out the antitrust mess with the Justice Department. No one else, I believe, no one at MIT, none of our attorneys, could have done that. The Justice Department withdrew the complaint. That one-page agreement that we came up with. Lots of people over there helped, but it was Constantine’s persistence that finally wore down those buggers. They weren’t prepared to work like he was.

I also knew that he had—what a lot of people probably did not know well—a real belief in diversity. He really believed in the whole issue of affirmative action. Is that not your view?

I think it had a lot to do with his life experience, coming here as a foreign citizen—learning along the way to speak flawless English and to correct all the rest of us for our grammatical mistakes. He had the experience himself of being the outsider, of being the minority in this institution. He had grown up in this institution and he understood it deeply.

He sure did. I really enjoyed working with him. I learned a lot from him. He was quite an individual.

In relation to that, there was a time when you had to make a decision as to whether to actually fire—I use the term fire or dismiss, or find some way in a nice way to get rid of Shirley McBay. I know there was a lot of influence about what to do in that regard from other senior officers, opinions about what ought to be done. Now I may be wrong, but I think that was the case. There was a period when things were very hot about that. Constantine, I think, also played a major role in giving advice.

There were two people who really were most involved in that: Constantine and John Deutch.

Okay. It was my view, indeed, by 1989 or 1990 that Shirley having been dean at that point for ten years it

was probably time to have someone else come into that job. My recollection of it, and I was not necessarily involved when things got hottest—I think Constantine and John were—was that that transition for Shirley and for MIT was greatly eased by the fact that she at that point was onto other things. She had her involvement with QEM. She had carried it about as far as she could here and we supported her fully in that. She knew she had to give it her full energy if she was going to carry it any further.

Now, you appointed her, as the only Academic Council member of the Institute who was black.

That’s right. She was the first black to come in at Academic Council level.

Yes. At that time, when you reflect on that appointment and on what happened over her term here, what would you comment about in terms of what was good about her tenure?

From my perspective, it was almost entirely positive. Shirley brought not a different perspective but the black presence to the Academic Council. That led to a lot of sparks flying around the table. It also led to some important friendships. I mean, Shirley and Gerry Wilson struck sparks as often as not, but they became real pals. There was a deep respect there both ways and they were good friends. I have no regrets about that, none at all. I don’t think Constantine did either. It was Constantine really who hired Shirley. When Carola Eisenberg left in 1979 to be dean at Harvard, Constantine took responsibility for the dean’s office and ran the search that produced Shirley. He and I knew that we were doing something important when we appointed her in 1980. I have no regrets about that. When I say I think Shirley had stayed long enough, that’s not a comment about her performance. It’s just a comment that when you do that job after ten years, you begin to wear out. That’s one of the most difficult jobs around this place. You’re where the rubber meets the road. You’re mediating the conflicts between the institution and the students all the time.

In fact, it’s almost like the presidency. After ten years, something tells you that it’s time to go, right?

Let me say one more thing. This is something I’ve never said to anyone else, *anyone* else—not to Constantine, not to my wife who is my best female friend, not to anyone else. You asked earlier on in this conversation, “Was there backlash? Talk about the settings in which you were trying to

explain what the Institute was doing.” That’s how I took it. I talked about meeting with the executive committee and the Corporation and the faculty a lot. Why did the Corporation in February 1971, when they appointed Jerry Wiesner president, why did they appoint me chancellor? I think it was the result of the exposure and the impressions I had created as a result of this period. I was thirty-nine years old. Why did they pick me as an ex-officio member of the Corporation and Jerry’s partner in that presidency? The only reason they had to know me, to know much about me, was what they heard from me about the work of the task force and the effort to change MIT in that period, 1968, 1969, 1970. I think in some real sense I had the opportunity to be chancellor, and because of that had the opportunity to be president, because of the Task Force on Educational Opportunity. I may be completely wrong about that, but I don’t think so. What that committee thought, they never told me. In fact, they never told Jerry and me anything about how they thought we ought to function together.

After about two or three months in the job, about this time—about July, August of 1971—I made an appointment to go down to Bell Laboratories and see Jim Fisk, who was chair of that search committee and who asked me to do the job. I said, “Jim, how did you guys think about this? How did you construe this relationship between Wiesner and Gray? How is it supposed to work?” He said in effect, “Go figure it out.” They didn’t have any idea how it was going to work, but they knew we liked each other and respected each other. They knew we had worked together for three or four years and they had some confidence that we could work it out. And we did.

But I’ve often wondered why they did that, why they picked out a thirty-nine-year-old to be Jerry’s partner in that. I think the experience we’ve been talking about had something to do with it, probably with the experience and the exposure that I had in dealing with the uproar around the time of the war protests, which was all happening at the same time more or less. It had a lot to do with it.



A meeting of the Task Force on Educational Opportunity, April 1971. Source: *Tech Talk*, 12 May 1971, courtesy of the MIT Museum.

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Reflections on the Black Experience at MIT, 1941–1999

By: Clarence G. Williams

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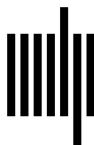
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