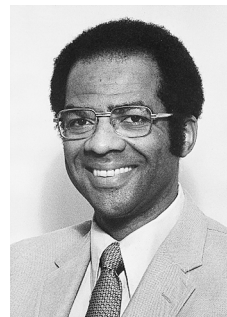


## JAMES J. BISHOP

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Part of my academic challenge was understanding both intellectually and practically what some issues of math and analytical thinking really meant. I was pretty much a disciplined student coming into MIT, and that I can attribute very much to my undergraduate education at LeMoyne College, now LeMoyne-Owen College, Memphis, Tennessee. That part was just a really amazing challenge. The other challenge, once I got involved in the civil rights movement at that time, was wanting to continue in the civil rights movement to help the cause, wanting to get my academic work done, wanting to deal with a young marriage, and wanting to keep in touch with people. There were just so many demands I was trying to balance at that time with little support.

I mentioned desegregation and how in some ways naive and shocking it was for me to come to the Boston area and not be able to find an apartment, but I also had no colleagues on that front with whom I could talk. The white friends in my inorganic chemistry unit—and as a graduate student you function pretty much in a unit—were going through the same issues of getting married, getting an apartment, and getting on with their degree work. None of them could or would talk about my not being able to find an apartment. In one apartment search case, since I knew people could file complaints, I went through the complaint process. Every time we changed houses, which was about every year, we went through the process. Massachusetts passed some laws against discrimination in housing. You could file complaints, but you needed a “tester” for a good case

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to be made. To be able to file, you needed a white person to go and apply for the place and get it. I remember calling up one Sunday morning a white friend of mine and asking him—a colleague—if he would just call the apartment or go by the apartment. He wouldn't do it. He had never thought about doing it before, but he wouldn't. So in that sense I was isolated, I was alone.

I think you could probably find more and more black students at MIT prior to the 1970s, and maybe even into the '80s, speaking of the loneliness of dealing with very special issues. Some of the faculty members I had knew about that issue and were sympathetic to it and were understanding. Some of the rest of them just didn't even want to hear about that issue. They just wanted to hear about the research and the academics. There was that fundamental challenge



that was very much going on with me as a graduate student.

Once I did some work in government and came back to grad school and decided that I didn't care what else happened, that I was going to complete my degree, I was able to put much of the other issue aside and cope with graduate school demands. But as is true of all of us who were of an age of consciousness when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., died, I remember that moment vividly. I remember I returned to the lab late one evening. I had gone home for supper. Upon entering the lab, a white colleague, another student, came to me and said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but there's a radio report that Dr. King has been shot." To this day, I don't remember what I said to him. I don't know if I thanked him. He did present it to me, I thought, very sensibly. Rich is his first name; I can't think of his last name now—Alcott, perhaps.

I essentially shut down my research bench. It meant shutting off the vacuum system or putting liquid nitrogen in it and stopping what I was doing, turning off all the heaters. I got my flashlight from my research bench which we used, got in my car, and I went to Roxbury. I knew that, like many of us, our youth were going to respond. We had had other riots around there, so I spent that evening out on Blue Hill Avenue with the organized parent and community group that helped with the busing back and forth to suburban areas. That office had a lot of other older black people trying to prevent our young people from being hurt as they expressed their anger in a violent fashion. We did that for two or three days till things sort of settled, at least right up until Dr. King was buried.

So that's over that period of time. Coming back to the Institute, interestingly enough, I had missed seeing any of the papers—the campus papers—about the kinds of steps that the black students on campus had done right around that same period. So I continued to miss those activities and sought to finish my degree. We're talking '68. In early '69, maybe April or so, I got the message from the dean of students inviting me to come in and talk to him about something. He and the executive secretary of the chemistry department made essentially two offers—a postdoctoral appointment and a position in the dean of students office.

Then another challenge came up. I decided not to work at that time with the man whom I deeply admired and who served as my Ph.D. advisor, Alan Davison. I wanted to work in a different field with research of a different style. I decided to work with Richard Holmes, who had been an older graduate student when I first arrived at MIT. I admired his work as a graduate student, so I was looking forward to working with him for a while.

The next challenge came, and this one was impossible. I just couldn't do both—I should have learned this from my earlier experience—half-time work in the administration and half-time work as a chemistry postdoctoral researcher. After trying that for several months, and enjoying very much and being challenged very much by my work in the dean's office, I accepted an offer to come and work in the dean's office full-time. I decided I would try that and if after a few years I decided I wanted to go back into chemistry, I would go back into chemistry in a research or teaching position. But, as you can see, I ended up for the most part staying in the administration and serving in administrative posts.

So there's really been a range of these challenges. Another challenge came as an administrator. As a black administrator, the students had certain expectations of me—some of which were valid, some of which were unrealistic, many of which needed to be met—and I had to struggle to figure out how to meet them. If students are demonstrating and if you're part of the administration, well, what role do you play in that? You can give some guidance to it. But at least I didn't feel I should be directly involved in demonstrations. I gave students a sufficient amount of information so they would know they were on the right track. When they're very militant, I might say, "Look, that's a good area for pushing, but maybe that's too extreme." So I went through those internal debates being a guider, a supporter, a counselor, an educator, a role model. I was going through all those matters and it was very, very tough.

*It's kind of what I think was said in one of our conferences we had, in 1982. I think it was Shirley McBay, the dean for student affairs, who made the point about serving two masters, so to speak. The difficulty in working with students makes it even more extreme in terms of how you deal with it. You were among the first blacks in that arena, and that was a very difficult role.*

It was extremely difficult. I think it became easier once there were more black administrators around, in two ways. One, we could share what our views were. We could all come out with kind of a group view of what was right and what was wrong for the group, although we as individuals might hold differences inside. It was in some ways both easier and challenging in another way. It was challenging because we black administrators had different views about issues, and those things got deeply interpersonal at times in ways that other people don't know. We got competitive in a way that African-Americans in small groups in large historically white institutions find themselves. Sometimes the competition was conscious and sometimes probably unconscious. It became difficult for us because students sometimes directly played upon that competition by saying, "So-and-So is supporting this group, how come you're not supporting that group?" But the relief came as we didn't have to feel that our individual decision was the only one affecting everybody. I didn't have to feel I was the only person speaking for the black community. That was in part a relief, as well as a challenge. I think as the black community grew—never large enough—within MIT, it became easier for all of us to work through and think through those issues.

So that became really a tough one. It also became a difficult one because, in addition to being an administrator of the programs, we were all in advising roles in which we wanted students to trust us openly and to share their views of what was going on. And they sometimes couldn't do it.

Another challenge was when we all looked at what's good in the long term and there arose a major discussion that was divisive about what the Office of Minority Affairs or Minority Education should do. One philosophy was that all issues pertaining to minority students, and even all minority employees, should be under that wing. Another view was that it should be supportive of the black community. When you look at it now, one can argue both sides. It shouldn't carry as much political weight, but it carried at that time enormous political and emotional weight within the black community because we all wanted to do what was best, but we also felt we had to be on the same voice on the same issue for all of us.

So regardless of which way one came down, it was that divisive part, I think, that made it hard.

I think it was harder for people in the administration who also had advising and counseling roles. I may be doing the faculty a disservice, but I don't think they were bothered by that quite as much. I may be wrong because I can remember some discussion with them. I can remember when a very brilliant faculty member and I, Jim Williams in mechanical engineering, had a fundamental debate in meetings about this issue. Then some years later over lunch we almost laughed with each other about how we got so riled up about that issue that it affected our relationship in which we both admired each other in many ways. There have been those wide ranges of challenges, I think, that have gone with each of us.

When I left MIT and went to Amherst College, I can tell you the same kind of issues still occurred. There I was in a senior position, actually making some decisions or recommending them to the administration or the board of trustees, and some of those same pressures and expectations continued both for me and for some of the more junior black faculty members who were there. They will go on, I think, for many a year, especially until there is a sufficient body of African-Americans within those communities. We have never reached that crucial size in which we can have sufficient diversity within our own group and support within our own group.

*You mentioned a very important point about this whole issue of the importance of having a critical mass of blacks. I remember watching all the major work you were involved in as an associate dean for student affairs. Your qualifications were excellent, particularly for a technical institution, but still you never could get beyond that point to be the dean of students, for which you clearly had all the qualifications. How do you see that?*

As you can see, I'm smiling now. There are times in my life I have not smiled and even at times today that I reflect on that matter without smiling. After I had worked in the dean of students office for a while, I came very much to see that that was one of my goals, to be the dean of students. MIT quite generously sent me to that wonderful Institute of Educational Management at Harvard, whose goal really is to prepare people for senior positions of responsibilities. So in that sense I felt ready for it, though I did not sense at the time in 1977 and '78 that such a position would be opening up at MIT. I hoped so and I said, "I either have

to sit here and wait and see whether one will open or take advantage of positions elsewhere.” I really loved MIT then and do now, and I loved Boston. I did not envision myself leaving the greater Boston area, but I was encouraged by Carola Eisenberg, who was the dean of students at that time, and others to apply for the position at Amherst College. I did and I loved the place from the first day I was there. I was delighted that they offered me the job, and I took on that deanship.

One of the challenges is, how does one avoid hating white people? I have to put that as bluntly as I can because I think that’s important. I said when I got to Boston and found all this housing discrimination, why didn’t I just turn and hate white people? Well, I was fortunate in that there was a group of whites in the Congress of Racial Equality who were “testing” and struggling with me in a different way. That helped during that time, although there were others who couldn’t relate to me.

It also helped when we had the debates at MIT meetings. I thought there were white people who were deeply committed to this issue. I still believe they’re deeply committed to it: Paul Gray, Ken Wadleigh, Jerry Wiesner, Howard Johnson, a wide range of faculty members such as Al Hill, and even people who didn’t have major administrative positions but sort of understood, I think, what was going on—Merton Kahne in psychiatry. And there was a large group of them. I think those individuals and discussions with them and people in the offices helped to keep some of my bitterness down.

Now, since that time, they did appoint an African-American woman in that, I think, very crucial position of dean for student affairs. There have not been a lot of other senior appointments of African-Americans around the Institute. That says a lot about a place that you and I admire. We know what it’s done at the student level. The other part that I watched over the years, and this happens when you’ve been around a place, is how MIT seemed to have mentored some people who moved up the ladder very well. From what I know of you and other African-American administrators, many of those people are as capable as or more capable than those who were mentored and appointed. But I’ve not seen MIT be able to find an African-American or two and mentor and support those people in that same way over a sustained period of time.

*You were the closest who came to it, and you know what happened there.*

That tells you some issues about the place. We have a number of people who have been at the heart of this institution. You’re one of them. You’re an administrator, you know what’s going on, you can see how that happens to nurture them and pick them up and go ahead with them. So although the place has done a lot, you can see how it has slacked off on that area.

I think the other area which has slacked off, as I look over the years, is that I’m not sure the dedicated personal involvement of the top administrators on affirmative action or equal opportunity, whatever you’re going to call these programs, exists now as it existed in the 1970s. Whether the students insisted upon it or whether the administration was committed, the results were that the president, the provost, the dean of students, and others spent time almost weekly at committee meetings wrestling with financial, educational, public relations, supportive measures to get more black students into MIT, to keep within MIT more black students, and to provide them with at least some levels of support. I don’t feel that exists at the place as one could have felt it then. Those are major losses there. We’ve both been there, we both are angered by that. I’m not sure we’re bitter about it.

*I’m not bitter, but I have to agree with you. I’m very upset about it.*

It would be instructive, it would be a metric—a word that MIT likes to use—to see what will happen to Phil Clay. He has certainly moved up that structure very well. He has been a tenured faculty member, he has been strong, he has played his hand in the right way as an outsider. He has been very, very successful, and what we need to see when those opportunities come up for lead jobs, academic leaders, is what will the institution feel regarding Phil Clay? Or will he have to find his opportunities elsewhere?

*With all the experiences you’ve had in lots of places, what advice would you give to black students coming to a place like MIT, which is not that different from Penn and other places you’ve been, like Amherst, and also to young black administrators?*

That’s a hard one. It’s a tough one, and I really never quite thought about it that way. I look at it differently now. I’m now sixty-one. I guess I look

at things very differently today than when I was in my thirties and forties. One strategy is for young black persons in deciding—“What do I want to do five, ten, fifteen years from now?”—to make sure whatever they’re doing is heading them toward that goal. That may mean at times not doing immediately some things for the black community and for young black people, but more for their own careers or families. In the long term, achieving those goals serves as a role model for younger blacks. It puts people in a position where they can do a lot more for younger blacks and do it on a kind of a timetable in which people feel, now, this person is just as skillful, just as accomplished as the non-blacks who are in those positions—though it’s very hard.

The next one is that I don’t care where they’re going in this predominantly white institution, they need to spend some time—I don’t mean a few months, but maybe a year—in a historically black, predominantly black institution, a college, university, or community in which the relationships, if they can be found in America anywhere, are a little bit closer to normality and in which the faculty and administration not only support black students but do it in a really nurturing, meaningful way throughout the community, including just the way of inviting folks over and eating, going to parties and dancing, doing all those things. But it also includes folks being able to tell people when they are right and when they are wrong, when they are behind in their work and when they are ahead of their work. I think this gives black students a realistic picture of what they need to do and where they are going. I think that’s very hard for most of us who are African-Americans in historically white institutions to always know, because people give us so many mixed signals and we’re not sure of it.

So those are the kinds of ideas I would really emphasize. The one I hope for most is that they can somehow figure out who they are very early. What are their guiding principles, intellectually, morally, politically? I have been and am a strong Democrat, though I did once work on a Republican governor’s staff as an independent. Part of that was because a number of people felt I could work with different groups and still hold to my political convictions. I have to tell you that working at that time for, I would say, even a modest middle-of-the-road conservative in Massachusetts, I, as a liberal, was in

a very different political climate than in the rest of the country, even in Massachusetts now. That opportunity gave me a chance to work with then Attorney General Ed Brooke, who was the first African-American elected to the U.S. Senate in this century—a marvelous, remarkable thing.

So those quality steps, I really think, are important—trying to find one’s self, getting in the middle of a historically black community and living there for a while, and never giving up one’s own personal long-term goals and aspirations, really just holding to all of those values.

The last advice for young African-Americans is to realize that this is still a racist world. It has changed in some ways, but one is going to find that it influences people we admire and work with, and it influences us with each other and with the rest of the world in trying to deal with racism.

*People like Paul Gray and Jerry Wiesner, my colleague Mary Rowe, this whole group of people you could say are a little cut above a lot of the white people we deal with. But it seems like even the best tend to have something they don’t quite understand as to what we actually see.*

We’re all victims of racism. It infects all of us. It infects the way you and I as black men interact with each other. It infects the way we interact with our white colleagues and friends and people on the street. When you get white people saying, “I see a black person, but I don’t see color,” we know that’s not true. But they say that. I’m not sure it’s any of the people you mentioned, but some of the most meaningful white people say that to you, and we know it’s just not true. Psychological studies, I think, show that that’s not true—white people see African-Americans as black people!

I don’t know whether our expectations of some of the people we talk about have been too high, too unrealistic. Sometimes our goals for ourselves and our fellow African-Americans have been too high. Although we’re all victims, I think we’re all still human and I hope—I sincerely hope I’m not bitter here—that we can still keep in mind from our Judeo-Christian backgrounds that we all have some errors, some shortcomings. We’re frail in some areas, we’re strong in others. I hope in the end we can push, be militant, but be reasonably forgiving as I think we can try to be with others.

*To go back a little, I think one of the things that would be very helpful is if you could talk a little bit about your*

*childhood, your family, and your early education before coming to college.*

I'm chuckling now when you say "early education." I just got back from a high school reunion, my forty-fifth. That made me think quite a bit about how much life has moved and changed over the years.

I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, back when that part of the country was highly segregated. I grew up in a family in which my father did not finish high school, except by what we nowadays would call the GED, general equivalency exam. But both my mother's parents had gone to college—to Lane College, in fact. My father, who lived in Natchez, Mississippi, came to Memphis and was surprised to learn that in Memphis African-Americans could take the examination to be a postman. He took it and passed it, so through that we had a reasonable lifestyle, until he got sick. When he was sick, my mother had to work taking in laundry for awhile and then she served as a substitute teacher. She had to go back to college—she had finished LeMoyné College earlier—because her degree was not from what I guess you would call a recognized, accredited college at the time. So she went back and got another degree and then taught fourth grade for some twenty-odd years.

I went to kindergarten, and the thing I always joke about is that I was a kindergarten dropout. Apparently, I did not want to go to kindergarten. My sister, a fellow postman friend of my father's, and a lot of other people along the way would get me going from home and push me through the neighborhood as we walked to Mrs. Potts's kindergarten about a mile from our home. For some reason I didn't like that place, although all my memories of it are quite pleasant. At some point, I guess, my parents had a discussion in which Mrs. Potts and someone else said, "That boy Jimmy Joe ain't ready." So I dropped out of kindergarten.

Then I went to Lincoln Elementary School in Memphis, a relatively small elementary school compared to many of the others in Memphis. It was right in the heart of the very poor neighborhood where we lived, and where my mother, who is ninety-six, is still living. From Lincoln Elementary School, I went to Booker T. Washington High School. Booker Washington was one of about four or five high schools for "Negroes," as we were designated at that time, but it was in many ways one of the best—at least we thought so—and

one of the more progressive. It had as its principal a very distinguished gentleman, Reverend Blair T. Hunt, well known in Memphis and throughout the South because of his strength as a principal and his ethical and moral and intellectual leadership, but also for his effective political skills in getting things for his high school. When we're looking back on these years now, it looks shameful and people might not believe us, but Booker T. Washington was the first high school for blacks that had a lab and that had Latin. It had a number of things of that level, and part of it was Mr. Hunt's political skills in insisting that these things come into the high school.

*How did you do in high school, academically?*

I did well in both high school and elementary school. I was about second or third in elementary school. My high school class had over 450 people in the regular class, plus a night school, so I think we had over 500 people graduating. I was number 10. Except for kindergarten, which I don't remember anything negative about, I enjoyed school. I really wasn't an exceptionally serious student until I got to college, where I worked much, much harder.

*How did you decide what college you would go to?*

One of the fortunate parts in my family life was that my mother's aunt, my great-aunt, who had gone to Lane College and then out to Oklahoma to teach, provided some funds for us on a monthly basis for saving accounts. My mother's mother, my grandmother, who was working in Chicago, also did that. So from the very early stages in my life, my brother, my sister, and I—the former two a bit older than I am—all knew that we could go to college. That really made a big difference. We could aspire for occupations based on a college education. Although the money that was saved was not a tremendous amount, it was at least enough for all of us in our family to be confident that if we did our work—our academic work in school—then we would be able to go to college.

My late father and my mother had lots of friends around the city, as she does now. Included in that were some dentists who would clean our teeth regularly. When I was in maybe late elementary school, and certainly throughout high school, I wanted to be a dentist. As I looked at my high school annual year book, when I was down there at the reunion, I realized that that was one of my

ambitions. So my first year in college, I took what would have been the pre-dental course. Then a little later I decided I wanted to be a physician, a medical doctor. Then I firmly decided, after having been inspired by some of my science teachers and by enjoying some informal work equivalent to being a TA, that I wanted to teach chemistry.

That was my career aspiration progression through college. Because I wanted to go into science and had done fairly well in elementary school, I was grouped. Schools in those days “tracked” students. The students in high school who had the best grades from elementary school got into the 9 1-A, 2-A, 3-A, 4-A’s, and other students were in higher numbered grades. It wasn’t always handled exactly that way, but it was close to it. Some of the placement also had to do, as I later learned, with what kind of influence parents had, the extent to which they could say, “I want my child to be in this class.” And one other factor, which was present in those days and is probably present now, was that if one’s parents were doing well, the school officials insisted that their sons and daughters do well. So they placed me and such students in classes that were sometimes much more demanding.

One of the things that was a requirement at that time was for most young men to take mechanical drawing. But since I wanted to be a dentist, my mother and father insisted I take a class in general science, which was generally not taught to students in the lower numbered sections. They actually let me into what turned out to be a wonderful class. It was great to know that Mrs. Ingram at that time was ensuring that everybody in her class, whether they were in 9-8-A or 9-1-A, learned science very well. That gave me a different appreciation for it.

I’ll give you one episode about how those things worked together. What I enjoyed most about that class initially, when I sat in the back of the room, was some of the great jokes by the guys who seemed to be older, certainly more sophisticated and more worldly than I was. I took the first six weeks’ exam and got a low grade in it. It must have been a low B or maybe even a C. I remember to this day Mrs. Ingram giving me that paper and having a conversation with me—either right on the spot or afterwards, I don’t remember when it was—and saying, “You can do better than this.” She placed me up front, not because I was doing well

but because she knew I ought to be doing better. Then I started to get very serious in that class.

We had, I thought, very committed, very capable, and very demanding teachers on the whole. These reunions bring a lot back. We were thinking about Mrs. Gassaway, who taught the math classes. We were thinking about a man we called “Poppa” Lowe, who taught chemistry in a very, we thought, challenging but encouraging way. We can remember Mr. John Wesley McGhee, I think was his name, who taught Latin to us, and demanding. So we really had excellent classes.

Near the end of maybe our junior year, some of the high school teachers and counselors started to look at youngsters who were doing well, who they thought should go to college. Then they gave us some practice on standardized tests and on vocabulary drills. I took some of those and received scholarships. They weren’t full scholarships at that time. I had also been very active in the band, and I received, I think, a couple of band scholarships to colleges in Arkansas and Alabama. But because I wanted to go to dental school, I assumed and started very early thinking that I would go to college locally at what was then LeMoyné College, a historically black institution, and would go off for post-college work. I was very fortunate in that my grades and my work on examinations led me to receive a four-year full tuition scholarship to LeMoyné College.

LeMoyné was a wonderful experience. It was then a very small college, and is a small college now. I think we had about 406 students at LeMoyné when I was there. As I said earlier, my mother had attended it, my brother graduated from LeMoyné, and my sister, who graduated from Talladega College, I think, had taken one or two summer classes there for her teacher’s certificate or to make up some part of her diploma work at Talladega. So it was a school that has very much been in our family. It was at that time the only institution of higher education in Memphis that would enroll African-Americans. There was a public university there—Memphis State, now the University of Memphis—that did not admit African-Americans. There was a private, four-year college, Christian Brothers College—now Christian Brothers University—that at that time did not admit blacks. There was, I think, a small Catholic college that also did not. So if you were in Memphis and you planned to go to college, you

planned to go to LeMoyne College in Memphis or off to the historically black institutions, private and public, in the South, or to a very few private colleges and a slightly larger number of public institutions in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and California.

So LeMoyne was a very logical choice for me. I also think it was the right choice for me. I don't think I was psychologically or emotionally prepared to go off to college. I remember when we had to take the scholarship exam for Fisk University and make out some paperwork for that, I kept procrastinating and my parents really had to push me to do that. I have a feeling now I just didn't quite want to leave home at the time. I think one of the reasons for that was that my father had been ill—quite ill, deathly ill—during much of my elementary school days. When I was in high school he recovered, thanks to the miracles of better surgery and antibiotics like penicillin that got rid of the infections in his lungs. He was able to go back to work somewhat—not fully at the post office, but to do some work around the city. That was a very happy time to be home. I think I wanted to enjoy that experience, and indeed I did so by attending LeMoyne and staying in Memphis.

There were other ways in which LeMoyne, I felt, was wonderful. It gave me just great personal attention from the teachers who were there. The staff, obviously, at the high school was all African-American. The faculty and staff at the college was actually a mixture of African-Americans and whites, with one or two Asians. All students had black and white teachers. It became my first experience as a black person of interacting with whites who treated me with full dignity as a student and as a young man. When I worked in jobs at a dry goods store and picked cotton for a while and cut grasses, we were always treated on those occasions pretty much as second-class citizens. Those class distinctions were always out front, and if you looked as if you were crossing them, someone was clearly there to remind you of it. But that was not the case, for the most part, at LeMoyne-Owen College. The teachers were open, the teachers were direct. The white teachers and the black teachers lived on or near the campus. They invited students to their homes. We went with them out for activities. And the cultural climate changed. LeMoyne College's auditorium and later its gymnasium, a good size for a place that small, were

almost the only places in Memphis where integrated audiences heard plays, heard international speakers, heard internationally renowned musicians such as, I can recall now, Leontyne Price.

That, too, broadened my cultural and intellectual environment. Teachers at LeMoyne, as teachers did at Booker T. Washington High School, pushed me and stimulated me and helped me. I found myself in college being much more serious about my work, and it was there that I found myself developing what I thought were some fairly good study skills. My grades were quite good in college. I graduated from LeMoyne “with highest honors and distinction.” But I also got involved in student government there. I was at one point president or chair of our student council and interacted with a number of people.

*Put some years on that, from elementary school up to college.*

I finished elementary school in 1950. You can sort of work that back, I guess, to my starting around '42 or '43, which is another interesting phenomenon. I was going into elementary school as World War II was ongoing. Part of my high school experience was as the Korean conflict was taking place. I finished Washington High School in 1954 and went immediately to LeMoyne College. I finished there in '58 and went to MIT.

*You really did come not only from a family with a very strong educational background, but also your surroundings, if I hear you correctly, were very inspirational to you as far as education was concerned.*

There were a number of places that did that—the elementary school, the two churches in which I was involved, the high school, the college, and, I think, the general community. My father was strongly active—very vigorously active—in Morningview Baptist Church, which was on the street right behind our house. We could go through our back lot, where at one point we had chickens and at another point we had a little garden, to go to Sunday school. I went there every Sunday morning. At church there were activities for youth. We learned the verses, interpreted the lessons, delivered our speeches, and were involved in other issues there. Even in that church, really in a very poor neighborhood which has gotten even poorer since I left it, Morningview Baptist Church encouraged education in school, gave recognition to youth, and encouraged people who went on to



high school and to college. My mother's church, Centenary Methodist Church, did similarly, but I was not as active there in some activities as I had been in Morningview Baptist Church.

But I think a key feature, at least for me, is that although my mother had gone to college, my father in many ways was inspiration for us—my brother, sister, and me. He was the one who in a kind fashion kept us thinking about our academic work. He loved to read and he read often. While he was ill in a sickbed in the house, I had many discussions with him. In the days prior to TV, we would listen to the radio and talk about those programs. We would talk about some of the classwork that I had to do. I can remember a discussion I had with my father before he passed in '88, which I had almost forgotten. During the discussion, he triggered my memory. I had to write a paper once and he reminded me how he had asked me a number of questions to get me thinking about this paper. This was either the high school or elementary school, and I got a very good grade on that paper. The teacher actually raised questions about whether I had written it.

There were other things that my father did, which may say something about my personality and about his personality that my family always jokes about. When I was just learning to count, they would give me some coins—a lot of pennies for house chores and everything else—and he would ask me to count them. I would get up to a certain number and I would tell him what I thought it was, and he would say, "Are you sure?" And I would go back and count them again. I got a lot of practice, but I guess eventually I got a little confident that way. I have to tell you that one of the techniques I use in my classroom, when students give answers, I start by saying, "Are you sure? And what are the reasons for that?"

So those kinds of encouragements took place. The key one was having the support in the house and really having the confidence that finances would not be a burden in my going to college. That, I think, made a difference. That became so evident from this class reunion. Out of the nearly 500 people, we had around 60 or 70 people there. I was reflecting on my elementary classmates and what happened to them, and on who went to college. In my neighborhood, given that there were so few college graduates and given how poor the neighborhood was, not nearly as many of my ele-

mentary classmates went on to college as I would have thought. There were some, but the numbers dropped down tremendously. However, in some of the public housing institutions—which were closer to the high school, and in those days you still had, the way the arrangements were made, a fair number of African-American college graduates were living in public housing, even though they may have been teaching school and the like—there were more role models in some ways there than in some of our other low-income communities in the area. As one person talked about this past weekend at the reunion, when people moved from neighborhoods into public housing, it was clearly a step up in housing environment, in social setting, and in the availability of nearby institutions. The YMCA was near some of the housing projects. Again, these were all segregated. Swimming pools were near public housing projects, and they were not in some of our very rough neighborhoods. So quite a few things have changed there.

One of my high school mates, whom I didn't know very much in that large high school class but got to know very well in college, was Marion Barry. We were in high school together, graduated in the same class, and were very close together in college, both of us being chemistry students working together and both receiving assistantships to go to Fisk as graduate students. Marion elected to do that at the time and I chose to go to MIT.

He was quite active. He really got started with his activities in politics at LeMoyné, because an event that affected many of us occurred. We were still in the throes of trying to get rid of segregation. The city had a segregated bus system. There had been a suit against the city, led by the NAACP, against public segregation. The lawyer who defended the city was a trustee of our college. He said in his defense of the city's practices some things which we heard, since many people in our community, including our college, went down to this trial. He said some things that we thought were demeaning of Negroes, African-Americans, or blacks. Our local campus chapter of the NAACP, for which Barry was the president, sent—if you look at it now—a fairly mild, polite letter. I don't know if it went to the chair of the board of trustees or to the president of the college, but the letter essentially requested that this gentleman, if you wish to call him that, step down from the board of trustees of a historically black institution.

I have to tell you that all hell broke out when that letter was published in the student newspaper and then in one, if not both, of the city newspapers. I think Marion came close to being expelled, which I didn't realize until later, with people at the college trying to put him out of school. But the president of the college at that time, Hollis F. Price, a wonderful man, held to principles. Marion had not done anything wrong, he had exerted his rights as a student, he was a leader. And Marion stayed on in that school. That was a very good lesson for me and other students. Many of us were really worried. As another colleague said, Marion didn't have as much support at that time as he should have. As far as those of us on the student council in those days, I don't remember whether we passed a very explicit resolution endorsing the action by the NAACP. Those of us in the NAACP supported it, but our names weren't on the line, as Marion's was. He did very well, and without the public support from me and other students who had voted for the letter to be sent.

There were other parts of my LeMoyné days that I think were very, very helpful. In many of our classes—I can cite two examples—the faculty members raised, in subtle ways sometimes but in direct ways others, arguments to counter segregation and arguments to counter feelings of inferiority. Dr. Walter W. Gibson taught our zoology class. He was an international authority on spiders in the Tennessee Valley area. There were not a lot of jobs available for blacks with Ph.D's and for black scholars, except at the historically black institutions of the South. And I can remember, as we would be discussing various things, that he would say something relating to race. One time he pointed out—I'm not sure what the topic was—that apes have thin lips not thick lips, that apes have straight hair not curly hair. Throughout the South—in literature, in cartoons, in jokes, and all of that—folks were trying to make African-Americans be so closely identified with monkeys and apes, and whites be as separate from those animals as possible. So Dr. Gibson's just pointing out ways to build up our confidence, to allow us to fight off whatever feelings of inferiority might be within us, and to counter scientifically other arguments was one of those sustaining, enlightening and, I really think, growing experiences that African-Americans do not get in historically white institutions, predominantly white institu-

tions. They might, but I have a feeling people may say it's not needed or they may be uncertain about doing it. But they did it there at LeMoyné.

My American history teacher, Clifton Johnson, grew up in the hills of North Carolina and spoke with an extremely deep, white Southern accent. I speak of him, as I do of all my college professors, with affection and with admiration and with gratitude, so the comment I make to you now is more a physical characteristic. When Cliff Johnson would get really talking about history in his accent, his neck would actually redden. But if you'd know Cliff Johnson, he taught us more about what the Civil War was all about, about how the Ku Klux Klan got into power, and how blacks who had a good deal of federal positions right after the Civil War lost those as Northern whites and others compromised and then allowed resegregation, resuppression, and recolonization of African-Americans in the South to occur. So Johnson also taught us how to understand the Constitution.

And all of our teachers worked on our writing, our speaking, our science, our historical backgrounds. We felt we were doing very well at LeMoyné-Owen College, and I think the college did remarkably well in taking us from where we started to where we left. Nearly everybody at the college got a teacher's certificate, because those were the jobs that were available in the South. You could be a teacher or a preacher or go on to medical school, dental school, law school, or morticians' school. There were not many people going into business, as we have fortunately now so many African-Americans doing. So the job of choice, the job at least for support and security, was a teaching position, and most of my college schoolmates took some time to get their teaching certificates.

*How did you happen to come to MIT after college? What kind of experience, as you recall it, were you exposed to here versus the kind of experience you had had in Tennessee?*

Somewhere between my sophomore year and junior year, around that time, I decided I did not want to be a dentist and I did not want to be a physician. I really wanted to be a college faculty member working at a historically black institution. I knew from the role models and others in college by that time that that meant I needed a master's

degree and a Ph.D. During my senior year, we had some information about career counseling, but not really a lot there. I didn't quite know how to go about it. I had to apply to a lot of places. Also, I knew I needed some finances. We had saved some money in the family, but not as much for paying for a graduate program as I knew would be the case. What I did not know at the time was how common, at least in those days, it was for most chemistry students at major graduate schools to get a research assistantship or a teaching assistantship. I really didn't know that, because of the limited experience my peers had in going to graduate schools.

I applied, I think, to over twenty universities. I got books about these universities and I looked at their programs. I was interested in either radio-chemistry or inorganic chemistry, so I wanted to know, did they offer those programs? I did not know then that you really try to choose a graduate program in part on the basis of the research programs at those institutions and other factors. There were very few teachers at my institution who knew much about MIT, so I applied primarily to state institutions in the North. I applied to only one Southern institution, and that was Fisk University—Fisk College, I think it was called at the time—which had granted, actually, research or teaching fellowships to both Marion Barry and me. I applied for lots of those assistantships, which meant a lot of paperwork, a lot of essays, and a lot of letters of recommendation sent for me by members of the college.

People were extremely supportive of me. I applied to Stanford out West, MIT and Boston University in the Northeast, and the Carnegie Institute of Technology and Illinois Institute of Technology. I don't think I applied to Northwestern, but I did apply to the University of Pittsburgh. It was a wide range of these. As you look at those, you could see that here I was, a person who was almost using a shotgun effect in applying to all of these schools. I knew I needed money and I wasn't sure about the programs.

I was granted admission—and this is not being boastful, but my grades were good and the recommendations were good—to all of the institutions to which I applied. I received some form of financial aid, usually in the form of a research assistantship or teaching assistantship, from all but Stanford. At the same time, I had applied for a

Danforth Graduate Teaching Fellowship. That was for young men and women who wanted to be teachers, who had some religious convictions, who had moral convictions, and who were very much dedicated to returning after graduate work to teach somewhere in the United States. So after getting the Danforth fellowship, much to my surprise and delight, I was able to go to any college or university I wanted. The fellowship could be applied to all of them.

So that opened up where I might go. There were interesting debates at that time within the family, within the college, and obviously within me and within the woman I was dating at the time, about where I should go. The real question was—and it almost goes back to that question I said about kindergarten—"Is Bish ready for MIT?" (At that time they were calling me "Bish.") I had really narrowed it, I think, to MIT, Carnegie Institute of Technology, and one other institution. I can remember so well how many people would come up to me, including the president of the college and others, and talk about some institutions, but not MIT. A few others would talk about MIT and the other teachers would talk about the spectrum. Part of the issue for the college itself, I think for LeMoyné and its faculty, was how prepared were their best students for going to these other institutions? But the good part about it was that people were caring. They wanted me to succeed, they did not want me to fail. They had seen some graduates, as in the case of all colleges, go off and not make it. They also, I think, did not want any poor reflections on their own school.

There were two faculty members I can remember, maybe three, who had roles here. I believe Dr. Gibson was not directive in his advice. He talked about programs and he talked about what he thought I could do, but to this day I do not remember him saying which of the institutions I should go to. He mentioned all that were very good. He had done his work, I think, at Iowa or Illinois, one of the state schools there. But Clifton Johnson who taught me history, a white fellow, and an art teacher who left—Reginald, I can't remember his last name now, maybe Morris—were the ones who really pushed MIT. I recall one of their points was, "If you don't try it, you'll never know." And that, plus talking to others and reading and looking at MIT's program, convinced me to give it a try.

So I applied, was admitted, and made the decision maybe in April or May to go. And I'm glad I did. But it was a great jump—a quantum leap, as scientists would say—between LeMoyne-Owen College and MIT. After being admitted, I looked at our curriculum, I looked at the courses I had to take, and I looked back on the classes I had taken at LeMoyne in which I thought I was very good, and in which I thought I was very weak. I didn't think my physical chemistry background was very strong and I didn't think my inorganic experience was very strong. But MIT had qualifying exams that all doctoral students in chemistry had to take on the first few days you were there, before classes started. I had to take this battery of three exams. I had studied quite hard that summer. I went back to my organic chemistry book and covered chapters alone that we had not been able to cover in my class. Fortunately, the textbook—by Fieser and Fieser, a wonderful book—had the answers in the back, so I could study the questions, check the answers, and see if I was correct. I had pretty much given up on doing much in physical chemistry, because I thought my background there was just too weak, and I was going to retake that class.

As it turned out, the only one I passed was the organic chemistry class. The other two exams I flunked. Failing those exams, it turned out, was the first time I could recall failing anything in college or high school or elementary school. I had been an okay student. Life had gone well and I had worked on it. I cried. I really cried about that, but I stuck it out and stayed with it. My advisor, Frank Albert Cotton, told me the situation in what was in some ways not, I would say, reassuring, but he placed things in perspective for me from a racial and a personal point of view. There were also some white guys who failed and some of them also failed more than one—not a lot of them, but a few did.

There were very few African-American students in chemistry or in any subject at MIT at the time. In chemistry, in my entering class, there were two of us. There was John Hopps, who finished Morehouse College and had a strong and superb background. He went on to get his Ph.D., I think, in nuclear chemistry. I'm not sure what John is doing at this time.

*He's supposed to be retiring from Morehouse College at the moment. He went down there as provost.*

So John and I went through it. We had some classes together. We had a class in thermodynamics, which he did very well in. He had been taught by McBay, as you know, for whom a program at MIT was named. John had an excellent background in calculus. I had done alright in calculus, very well by LeMoyne standards; I got A's in college math classes; but I didn't understand it well. I didn't understand it conceptually. I didn't understand how to make applications of the science and the math that I had had before.

So MIT was a major transition for me. I did study hard that year. They said, "Go back and take some undergraduate class and be a TA in freshman chemistry." I learned an awful lot from those subjects. Here I was taking physical chemistry with undergraduate juniors and seniors at MIT. There were a few other graduate students in there, but that's when I really learned to study an awful lot more. Later in the year, I did pass those qualifying exams.

Then we had to take our orals. The first time, we had to select two research proposals. One of them I wrote well and answered the questions and passed it. Another one, I don't know how this happened, somehow I missed a research article. So what I was proposing had actually been done by someone. It was apparently alright, but it had already been done and therefore was not acceptable. I had to redo that and pass it. So the first year was a very strong sense of transition.

Later, I became close to some faculty members. Many of the older ones have passed. This included a gentleman, Charles Coryell, who died of cancer quite some time ago, and some who are still there now and others who left MIT and moved elsewhere. So I had a range of people whom I knew. One of the faculty who handled 5.01 and 5.02, I guess it was, the basic freshman chemistry class that all MIT students had to take at that point, was C. C. Stephenson. Somewhere in my first or second year, fairly early on, he told me that they had looked at my grades and they had never had anyone from my college attend MIT before. You know well that colleges like to compare applicants with folks who have come before. Since they didn't have anyone, they said, "Let's try him." So I tried MIT, MIT tried me, and I'm glad we both did that. For Morehouse, they had had experience with it and they knew how well Morehouse students could do.

Let me mention another experience that occurred when I went to MIT. I had been up North before. My grandmother and step-grandfather lived in Chicago, so we went up there some summers. There you could ride anywhere you wanted to in the bus, there weren't signs saying "water for colored" and "water for whites," and you could go to the movies and do the things that others had done. Although housing was still segregated in Chicago and there was major job discrimination, at least the public accommodations and transportation issues were not as evident there.

My trip to Boston involved another transition. In those days, we went by train or by bus. It was leaving segregated Memphis on a segregated train, getting to Washington, DC, and changing into what at that point would have been a desegregated change. A lot of people were applying for housing at MIT, and they didn't have much graduate housing. What is now Ashdown House was the Graduate House at that point. I applied for a room. There weren't enough and I didn't get in. So immediately getting off the train, taking a taxi across Back Bay to MIT and checking in, I had to apply for housing, didn't get it, and said, "Now, what do I do?" There was a housing office at MIT at the time. I think it was in Building 7. They gave me information about how to apply for rooms.

Well, I discovered that Boston, this cradle of liberty, was segregated in housing. I looked in Back Bay. There were no homes available for me, no apartments. I rented a room near MIT, just near Inman Square—a very small room, where I had to share a bath with the black family. There was really that important black connection right into the community, but it reminded me again of how our nation treats African-Americans and where those coming from the South find support. That aspect I somehow had not quite expected.

Within a week or two, or maybe it was within three weeks or so, an opening occurred at the Graduate House and I was able to move into it. I got a room assignment. The first two people who were assigned to live with me—they were white—moved out. And so did the third one later. One guy just came in the room and walked right out. I never saw him again. He said hello and I'm not even sure he introduced himself. Another fellow was sort of polite and courteous. He introduced himself, but then vanished. I saw them all again in the Graduate House. Another fellow came in and

stayed for a while. But I was getting up very early, studying for exams. He had had a background at Harvard and I guess he felt pretty comfortable about his background, so he could sleep in. My alarm clock woke him up a lot and we had one of those real roommate conflicts. I'm not sure, but I think he moved out because of that, not necessarily because of race. Then I was assigned an Indian roommate—from India, the nation—and he and I roomed together for a year.

So I learned quite a bit about Boston, about Cambridge, about myself, and about MIT in those first weeks at the place. John Hopps was in Graduate House. We did a little bit of homework together. There was one other African-American I remember—there may have been a few more, but there were not a lot of them—and that was James Mayo, who was in physics. Jim was very active in Graduate House as a leader and as a supporter of new students. So that realm was very, very helpful. But other than that, if you walked the corridors, if you went through Graduate House, if you went around the labs, there were almost no African-Americans to be seen or heard, except in the physical plant area.

*On the graduate level, there were fewer than ten of you in the entire graduate program.*

At that time, there were very, very few and we were all isolated. If we didn't link up in Graduate House or see each other and speak or something like that, they didn't pull you together. Graduate school being what it is, your connections are mostly with folks in your classes or in your research group, and you don't get a chance to link with quite as many people.

*That's quite a different experience from Tennessee. You're talking about what year?*

I came in 1958.

*That's a major achievement for an African-American to be admitted to MIT in 1958 to the graduate program.*

The good part about MIT's history is that a few faculty admission committees, not being pushed by law and not being pushed by the institution, said, "Let's try somebody." I'm assuming, though I don't know for certain, that they knew my race. Had the admissions committee in chemistry at that time not known my race, they might have just said, "Here's another small college from where we've never had anybody admitted." That, in fact,

might exactly have been what the case was. I don't know.

As I reflect now on that conversation I had with C. C. Stephenson, I don't think it had the racial element in it. I assume, given the huge amount of stuff that MIT asked for at that time and the pages from the catalog, that there was enough information in there for them to know that LeMoyné was an African-American or historically black institution. But it was years later—ten years later, with the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.—before a major push occurred at the graduate level and at the undergraduate level to get more African-Americans as students, followed by more African-Americans trying to work with those admitted students at MIT.

There were people—not only the faculty, but in the administration and in the student body, African-American students—who had a major impact on me personally, academically, professionally, and politically.

*Give a brief summary and analysis of your perspective on the MIT experience.*

I saw it obviously in different capacities, first as a young graduate student immediately out of college. Then, as you know, I took some time away—initially a year—and went and taught at Atlanta University. Then I returned to graduate school for about a full year, not quite that. Then I worked for two years on the governor's staff in Massachusetts. Then I came back to MIT and finished up my Ph.D. That gave me a view as a more mature graduate student. Then I was an administrator for a number of years and, finally, an alumnus doing some volunteer work on various committees at the place.

Overall, I think I've looked at it from different vantage points. From each of those points, you see some things of MIT that are the same. For example, one always sees it as a place with some very, very talented and accomplished people in all roles. With students and faculty, staff, administrators just across the line—from folks who work in housing and dining to the campus patrol, to the alumni, just at all levels—you see MIT as a place that does fantastic work by, on the whole, people who outwardly are very confident in their work. That's one view you see.

You also see it in some ways as a special place, as a place that because it is so centered around sci-

ence and mathematics and engineering, has a lingo and a style that I think is not common in many other institutions. To be successful and comfortable at MIT, you have to be able to participate in that. It doesn't mean that everyone needs to be a mathematician, but you at least need to know that if you're at MIT, people expect some quantitative data to support arguments, whether one is addressing an admissions policy, a financial aid policy, or a location of a building. You've been in with the president and worked with the chair of the Corporation. I'm sure you see that occurring at those levels as well as one would see it at the administrative or the counseling or the academic levels.

One also sees over those years, as I have seen in many other institutions, that it's a predominantly white place. That sea of white, for those of us who are African-American and black, puts it in a different perspective, regardless of our skills and whether or not we are comfortable with science and math. It requires other adjustments on a daily basis, other changes, other steps of always walking between—as Du Bois put it—"two worlds," the world of African-Americans or blacks, and the world of American whites.

Plus, MIT is a place that is enormously resourceful. Even in some of the tightest times I can remember at MIT about money and finances, when things were being cut way back, it still had so much more than all of the other institutions that I had attended as a student. It was even more resourceful in lots of ways than the University of Pennsylvania. Thus, when you are working at MIT or are a student at MIT, you can think pretty big in many ways. If you've got great ideas and you can persuade people that they're worth carrying out, you can gain a lot of support for them and they're apt to work. You just don't get into those hassles often on the lack of finances that stops talk and thought.

I enjoyed my days at MIT. There were some tough times as you know, having been there even a longer period than I have. But I enjoyed the challenges. I enjoyed the changes, which you and I and many other African-Americans at all levels participated in. I enjoyed meeting a range of people—students, faculty, staff, alumni, a few Corporation members, visitors who came there. I enjoyed going out into the cities for some short recruitment visits for MIT. So in that sense, I thought it was an enjoyable experience.

For me, it was also a very growing experience. I think I grew up intellectually, politically, and professionally at MIT. For that, I think I'm quite grateful. It has made a difference in what has happened in my career, in other places and at other times of my life. It was at MIT that I established some long-lasting, warm friendships with many people. So all of those are ways in which I look back upon it as really positive.

There's another part of my view of MIT which may seem cynical, but it seems to me that, as an African-American who was there as a student and particularly as an administrator, if we put together all of those resources, all of those talented people, all of the prestige and impact and weight that MIT and its members carry, it never fulfilled its potential and its promise to African-Americans. Although it started, and I think did a really fine job—ahead, as you know, of many other institutions in recruiting students—the Institute seems never to have reached, I think, even a modicum of success with faculty. I think the progress with minority students has been stellar at MIT. By minority students here, I clearly mean the collection of African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other groups which until the '70s had been highly underrepresented, almost invisible at MIT. The numbers I have seen, as I've been on the Corporation visiting committee for undergraduate education and students, have shown me how much things have increased for Hispanics and, I think, for Native Americans in ways that one would probably not have expected earlier—and also for Asian-Americans. But for African-Americans, the progress started, it went up, and it seems that the numbers then leveled off and in some areas went down.

You're closer to those numbers than I am, but one would certainly think that by this time we would have a much more substantial cohort of African-American faculty members at MIT. One would have thought that if the Institute could not recruit them elsewhere, it could have grown them in-house. And as we look at African-American students who have done their undergraduate work there and those who have done their graduate work there—and some students have done both—one would have thought that in all of our fields there would be a higher fraction of African-Americans, a higher set of numbers of African-Americans within the tenured positions.

Now I've been out of the place, so I don't know what's been the actual pattern, but I believe we've had a number of African-Americans come in and not succeed in getting tenure at the Institute—or for other reasons decided it was not a healthy climate for them, and they left. So of all the positive things I can say about it, I still have this wish and this disappointment at the potential, at the promise, at the commitment that began really in the very late '60s and was reinforced in the '70s with programs, with people, and with resources that have not yielded the results we hoped for. The potential has not been fulfilled and the hope and promise have not come to be as we wanted it to be.

*You have had high-level experiences at several of our major universities in the country, so you've also seen it from the top in terms of these particular institutions you have been a part of. Based on all the wealth of experiences you've had—not only at those institutions, but also here at MIT—what could you say that you think would be helpful to an administration here, relative to this whole issue of increasing the number of black and other minority faculty members in this day and time?*

Two points on that. First, I have worked at other institutions across the country, both historically black institutions and white institutions. I was at Atlanta University for a short period of time and did my undergraduate work at LeMoyne College, where I'm now a member of the board of trustees. I was dean of students, as you know, at Amherst College, then vice provost for university life at the University of Pennsylvania, and then served in the provost's office here at Ohio State as a special assistant to the provost for a number of years. So first of all, I'd like to say that although MIT has not fulfilled that hope and promise that we all thought it would and we still believe it could, its record in many ways is still better than some of those other institutions. So what I say is, "If not MIT, where?"

There may be other institutions that have done a better job with faculty. Take Harvard University, for example, just up the road. One can right off the bat think of the names of very distinguished African-American scholars who have come into the various programs of that institution, whether you're speaking of law, African-American studies, or other areas. I'm not sure if its overall numbers are as high as that institution would like, or as we think it should be, or whether propor-

tionally it has more than MIT, but at least one can think of very notable African-Americans who have come into distinguished positions there at Harvard. Part of what they've done there—and this gets to the advice issue that we talked about a lot at MIT and other institutions—is that in order to be successful in recruiting and maintaining African-Americans, it seems as if a critical mass is needed, so that people have a sense, within the larger community, of an African-American community with sufficient numbers. People can thrive and work as they wish and as often as they need in both of those communities.

I think the other issue is a need for a permanent, lasting commitment at the very top of the university by the trustees, the president, the chairman of the Corporation, and all of the deans. Deans and department chairs are the ones who very much set the policy statements and the spirit of what's going to happen in the day-to-day functioning of those academic units. Just as we talked before about how much of a concerted effort there was to begin recruiting African-Americans, first undergraduate students and then graduate students, that same effort, I think—and I want to be fair on this—was not done as well with faculty. Some of it is a structural issue. You can have centralized recruiting of undergraduate students, you can have basically one office for undergraduate admissions and a financial aid office to support it. At the graduate level, because you've done this, you know you can do some recruiting, but at that level you also have to have the unit—the faculty in the academic unit—play equal parts in it. By the time you reach the faculty, you can do a little bit of recruiting centrally—not a great deal—but almost all of it goes back to focus on the deans, the department chairs, and distinguished section leaders. That's where I think the priorities have just simply not been steady for recruiting and for sustaining African-Americans.

Let me just come to one part of this. The one area where that perhaps could have been done was in developing and nourishing MIT's own graduate students as they moved up through the ranks. And similarly, perhaps, in some of the administrative levels. I think only recently Ike Colbert was appointed to the Academic Council as dean of graduate students. He's a member of that group. I don't know if at this time there are any other African-Americans on that Academic Council.

*Yes, Phillip Clay as associate provost.*

Those are two and that, as you know, has been a long time in the making. We're glad it's there and, after some twenty or almost thirty years now—thirty-one years, I believe, since a group of African-American students went to the administration following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and said, "Let's make some changes here," and the administration responded positively to that—we're just at this stage reaching that point. I don't know how many African-Americans over the last two or three decades we've had as departmental chairpersons.

*One—Phillip Clay.*

Good! Phillip Clay again. So Phillip is in some ways setting a standard. He's one of the Institute's own graduates and that's quite good, but they need more of those. Other institutions have been successful, and MIT has too, in recruiting people it wanted from all parts of the world. There are distinguished African-Americans in numerous positions in all parts of the world, and one would hope that the Institute would have recruited those or would have grown and developed some of its own. And that, unfortunately, has not happened as well as it should.

The really sad part about it is that there ought to be sequels to your book. There ought to be some different chapters about the large numbers of African-Americans who will come into the place, either as students or as recruits from elsewhere in different parts, and will be in the leading spots, in influential places in the institution. Let's hope that that can still be possible. It will probably be the generation behind us. They will have to push a lot more to enable that to happen.

*What advice might you offer to other black students, faculty members, or administrators who would be coming to a place like MIT?*

The most obvious thing is that matters have changed in our country a lot since I first came to MIT as a student. Many African-Americans now attend high schools along with whites, and they have whites in their classes. I was coming to MIT from undergraduate and high school experiences in which all of my fellow students were African-American. At MIT very few were African-American and there were a lot more international students. That is one difference—one change, in fact—that many African-Americans would not



have experienced. On the other hand, so many of our high schools in this country are almost entirely African-American, so that students coming from those institutions are facing some of the same problems I had when I left LeMoyne College and, for a few years prior to that, Booker T. Washington High and coming north to an essentially all-white institution. That transition is still, I think, important for many people.

The second thing—and this, I think, pertains to us regardless of our race or our ethnicity—is that for nearly everyone who comes to MIT as a student, the place is a step higher and in many instances a large step or quantum leap or two or three steps above where one was before. That’s “above it all” in terms of the challenges, the demands, the skills, discipline, and hard work that are needed to succeed. But MIT is also a very competitive place where folks compete a lot. That’s the nature of science. Everyone wants to be successful at the place and many people want to be ahead. When I talk to students there, I realize how much of a drive folks have to be on top. Given that you have to be generally on top or nearly on top in order to get into MIT, you need to make an adjustment and say, “Hey, I’m not always going to be at the top. Being at this place, being average at MIT, still puts one in a pretty unique pool of folks.” The adjustment to that climate, the environment, is a very difficult one.

I remember quite well that once I took a vacation from MIT and went to California. One of the former MIT students I visited there was Nate Seely, who had done his undergraduate work in electrical engineering at MIT and then had moved to Stanford. I spent about an hour or maybe two hours with him on the campus. We talked and I think we had lunch together. He made a comparison between his life at MIT and his life at Stanford. I can remember this conversation quite well. He said he didn’t seem to work as hard at Stanford as he did at MIT, but he still got as much done and he was learning as much. He said he had time to go bicycling with his girlfriend, the kinds of things that at MIT he didn’t feel he had time to do.

So it’s that climate, that hard-working, being forever busy climate of MIT that’s not, I think, at some other very distinguished and highly successful institutions, Stanford being one of them. So when you come to MIT, I think, you have to be

prepared as a student or as a professor to work in that kind of almost grinding environment. I’m not saying that’s the way it should be. I think there needs to be time for more relaxation, a lot more reflection, a lot more introspection as opposed to production, at the place. So I think that is one element of advice that’s to be heeded.

Also, I came from a richly supportive African-American environment. For those African-Americans who come to MIT having been in an almost entirely white environment, they need some way to get away from MIT on a full-time basis and go to a historically black environment, where there’s a historically black or predominantly black college or neighborhood or work environment. I think it will increase their personal perspective on themselves, on America, and the rest of the people with whom they have to live and work, including African-Americans as well as whites. That can be very difficult to do at a place that has pretty well laid out a schedule of how you function as an undergraduate, as a graduate student, as a professor, and as an administrator. But somewhere, before one is too far along in his or her years or career development, my strongest advice—no matter how successful they have been or even how much they love what MIT is offering—is for our younger fellow African-Americans to take a leave from that special white world and come home again, or come home for the first time if they’ve not been there before. I would hope that, with that kind of a leave that MIT students can certainly take when they wish to take it, more students will be encouraged to do that.

I would hope students would be encouraged to realize that they’re going to get jobs in this day and age. That has generally not been a problem, I think, for quite a few years for MIT graduates. I’m not sure in any recent years that that has been a problem, even the last thirty years, at all for African-American graduates of MIT. It would be interesting to see what kind of employment difficulties, if any, African-American graduates of MIT have. I would be inclined to think not many. As I’ve met alumni, I don’t recall talking to many who were unemployed. They may not have achieved the exact jobs they wished in the areas they wished, but they all seem, once they’ve finished the place, to have been fairly successful in their life. Is that generally the pattern?

*Virtually everybody I interviewed has been extremely successful.*

That doesn't surprise me at all. That speaks well of the people who came as well as what they accomplished at MIT. But that break, that break from that white world of "MIT Lite" to a historically black institution, I think would be extremely helpful for people to take.

Other advice for them is to do something which we didn't have at MIT at the time, that we have now and that others created prior to our getting there, and that is to get linked up with the African-American community at MIT and in the surrounding communities. People can do that in a variety of ways. Some join fraternities and sororities, some join groups, some work in neighborhoods, some participate in churches, some get into theatrical, musical, or volunteer groups. But I think some connection would help. I think when I first came to MIT, my primary concerns were trying to succeed academically. Nothing else seemed to have been entering my mind. As I look back on it now, I wish the few of us who were around there had really built and strengthened those linkages earlier. But those resources are there now.

Other resources present now that weren't there at that time were ones that you and I participated in and you and I created. There now is a bank of African-American administrators and faculty and staff to which students, faculty, and staff can also link. One would hope that there would be more partnerships and more mentorships, more friendships, and more relationships—whether they're very intense or occasional—so that at least people will know about those, tap into those, and make the greatest use of them for survivability. All groups have their codes and their secrets and their patterns. They have their ways of passing on information and advice for survivability and for thriving to new members and to younger members. The African-American community, the black community at MIT, I think, has that resource and needs to share it more and more.

The other bit of advice, and this is a harder one for people to accept, is that they should realize that in some ways they represent the black community, but in other ways they are not carrying the full black community on their heads and shoulders. If they fail in some activities, and this we are all apt to do, it's an individual shortcoming—it is not a blow against the whole race and the whole

institution. Those of us of our age worried about that an enormous amount in those days when the numbers of us were so small at MIT and elsewhere. I'm hoping that that is less of an issue, less of a demand, less of a bad dream, less of an oppressive force on today's African-American students, faculty, and staff than it was so much on us, both consciously and unconsciously.

That's a very hard one, I think, to deal with. It's not something you say, "I'm going to go out and take this step." It requires some sort of intrinsic, internal adjustments. One way of that happening, though you can't do it always, is to try to recognize and try to get into places where one is not the only African-American. It gets back to that critical mass again. Sometimes the critical mass may be two in a room as opposed to one. I'm almost certain that most days in which you go to meetings, and the same is true for me, I can expect that most of the people—if not all of the people in the room except myself—would not be African-American. Unless it's a meeting dealing with issues of African-Americans, getting more than two or three in most of the meetings we go to just doesn't generally happen. You find yourself often alone.

I think one of the burdens, potentially, you have to carry when you're the only African-American in a room is that the whites expect you to speak for all African-Americans. Yet we don't, we can't. A faculty member at Amherst College—Dr. Andrea Rushing, I recall—made a wonderful point to young students. She was trained as an anthropologist and had grown up, I think, in the New York area. She said to people, "If folks ask you to represent the black community, tell about the black culture and all that, remind them that you're a student and you're not an anthropologist." She said she didn't know about her own community and many other communities until she had really studied those issues. It's an enormous burden for a youngster to get placed upon him to explain, to justify, and to describe all about the African-American culture. People need to be able to say, "Look, we are many people and here is my view. I speak for myself. In some ways I may be able to share views of the larger group, but not in others."

I guess the last bit of advice is on that point, that we as African-Americans have to realize that we have our different views and we can share our different views both with each other and in other climates. That becomes far more difficult to do

when the weight of decisions seems so important. Say we're speaking, for example, about what may be the best way of recruiting African-American faculty members. If you have one view and I have one view, the best way for us to look at that is that we've got two potentially good views out, not necessarily two competing views. One may be better than the other one, or they may be equally good depending on which one might fit the circumstances at that time. But we're often looking for kind of a unitary position for the African-American community to support. I think there's less of that now, and whenever there are more people, that certainly becomes less of an issue.

*Talk about any topic or issue that comes to mind that reflects on your own experience and on the experience of other blacks at MIT and other institutions you have been a part of, that you think may help the next generation of people who have this same kind of issue to deal with.*

Let me cover three areas. I want to talk about people—the people I admire, the people who had an impact upon me—and use that to encourage people very much to really reach out to others. When I first came to MIT, I think they had only one black faculty member, a fellow who was teaching German. I took that course my first year for passing my language examinations for the doctoral program. There were no African-American faculty members whatsoever in science. Yet I learned an awful lot from many of the white faculty members who were there. There were folks who are still alive now and some who have passed whom I greatly admired, and they had several features that I wanted to emulate as a scientist and as a science teacher.

I can remember Dr. Charles Coryell, who died around the time I was a graduate student from a raging cancer in many parts of his body. It probably came from his work on the Manhattan Project with a lot of radioactive materials. He was not only a distinguished leader in his field internationally, he was one of those faculty members who was enormously respected and loved. People enjoyed being around him. Charles Coryell had that quality about him.

There were some folks whose classes I took in physical chemistry—Isadore Amdur, who I think has also passed at this stage, and others who in their informal interactions with me when they bumped into me in a lab, or in the machine shop

when I was working on something, would just strike up a conversation, one, to get to know me, but also to give practical advice about the device and whatever else with which I was working. I had seen them in lecture classes being extremely well prepared. I had been in a recitation section with Isadore Amdur with about thirty students, and noticed how he asked questions and encouraged people. Those, as well as Frank A. Cotton in inorganic chemistry, who was an advisor of mine, all set a stage of professional competency in their field. And I said, "Boy, that's great." I really wanted to look at people at the top and come as close to that as I could.

So I think one of the things for young people to do is to try and find the very best folks around MIT, and there are many of them—learn from them, learn their qualities, get to know them, see how they are successful in their fields, ask them to be advisors and resources, get tips on big things and small things, and, in brief, just make the most of the place by reaching out to them. But as a young graduate student, I have to tell you I found that very, very hard to do. I was shy and intimidated. When I returned to grad school, after having worked in government for a while and taught for one year, I was much more secure, I think, in myself and in my abilities. Where I was not as secure about them, I think I felt I could still ask for help. So I think one needs to really reach out to folks, be able to raise a hand and say, "Assist me, help me, give me a hand, do something for me at this point," and not be embarrassed about it.

That's hard, particularly for MIT folks. All of us who have come there work so independently at times that it's hard to join with someone else because it may make us feel dependent as opposed to independent. People helped in that regard. I can go through a wide range of people there.

As I was finishing my graduate work, when I came back after one stop into teaching and another time to work in government, I had a sense of what I really wanted to do. First, I wanted a research project that was very likely at that point to be concluded in a particular number of years. I selected a project with Alan Davison. I got to know him and something about his work. He's a man I got to know enormously. I think he balanced well his personal life, his professional life, his teaching life, and his research life. These days he has been working on the thing that I guess all of us

often want to do in science—some work that has had a very practical usage in the everyday world of the health sciences.

Almost ten years ago now, I had to go to the hospital and take a test, a stress test. I had passed out and the doctors eventually found out it was a relatively minor problem, but we went through and did a lot of exercises and tests. At one point this physician injected a particular substance in me to see how my blood was circulating and to monitor some aspects of my heart. I was curious about the test and the background of it. He said, “I’ll give you a reference on it.” I was delighted to see that the reference on it was connected with work that Alan Davison had done. These were inorganic chemicals that now have this profound health benefit, and I was even a personal beneficiary of that. So that’s the sort of people I saw at MIT. I can go through a lot of them in the faculty.

The next group really had to do with administrators. When I first came there, there were just a few of us—a very small handful of black administrators. There was John Mims. John had been hired maybe in December of ’68 or very early in ’69 to recruit African-American students. I think it had been one of the commitments that the institution had made to the black students’ demands. I think they had a set of about ten or fifteen demands, I don’t remember the exact number of them. One really called for some full-time administrators to work on matters. John was hired to work on the admissions part.

I can remember the first time I saw John. It was not really even connected with any work at all. I was going through the “infinite corridor” down there, near where the office was. People sort of pass each other rapidly there. I must have been going over to the Coop or something, that end of the campus. I can just remember seeing him, a distinctive face, walking down the hall very thoughtful, almost stressed—a new face, because I hadn’t seen it much. We didn’t interact at that time at all. I just noted it. Then later I met John because the administration was very much seeking to hire another African-American, this time to work in the student affairs office doing two things. One was coordinating Project Interphase, a summer transitional program for African-American and other students, and the second was to provide some academic and perhaps personal connections with the African-American students.

I got a call one day from Dr. John Irvine, who was, I think, the executive director or executive chairperson—I’m not sure of his exact title then—of the chemistry department. He was another chemistry faculty member who had been on my examinations. I knew him well in that regard. When he was serving as the executive officer of the chemistry department, he worked on assistantships and things like that, so I got to know him well. We were not personally very close, but I just sort of knew him. He gave me a call one day and said the dean wanted to talk to me. I didn’t know who the dean of student affairs was at MIT. I knew about the dean from my undergraduate days at LeMoyné: You’d say, “My goodness, what is the dean calling me for? What have I done? What kind of trouble have I gotten into?” But in any event, he said he wanted to talk to me.

At that time, I was finishing up my Ph.D. successfully and was really trying to think about what I wanted to do. Having done some work in government and having taught, I wanted a mixture. I was thinking of going out West, I was thinking of moving down South, but I had come to really love the greater Boston area for many reasons. I enjoyed skiing, enjoyed the seacoast, enjoyed the city of Boston, and enjoyed the climate—a lot more temperate in some ways than the very hot weather which you and I grew up in down South.

So in brief, I got this invitation to go down and speak with Ken Wadleigh. Ken was a very direct guy. His training was in mechanical engineering. He asked a few questions and got immediately to the point of what he wanted. He wanted me to come in and work on this program. The interesting thing about it—this was in ’69—was that a small group of African-American students, undergraduates and graduate students, had visited the administration and made these demands. I wasn’t part of this group. I knew very little about them. They may have been written up in *Tech Talk*, but I frankly don’t remember. But there certainly were not running through the chemistry department a lot of discussions about the demands. They were not mentioned in the ranks of inorganic chemistry. I probably saw very, very little of issues in my daily work as a chemistry student.

At that time, I was active in the civil rights movement in the community, but on the campus issues I had not spent much time dealing with

those at all. So Dean Wadleigh, in part, was bringing me up to date on things other African-American MIT students had done. The very first part of it was, here I was being offered a job growing out of insistent requests—demands, really—of African-American students also on campus with whom I had very little contact. I don't know if Jim Mayo was in that group or not. They were a younger group of students. At that time, I was living off-campus in an apartment. I did my chemistry work and did some volunteer work for the Congress of Racial Equality, but not much on campus beyond that.

So I learned a little bit about the job, and it seemed interesting. The part of it that seemed most interesting to me is that it would give me a chance, if I accepted it, to work in the administration and to continue some work in chemistry as a postdoctoral student. So between John Irvine's efforts and Ken Wadleigh's efforts, a job offer was put together and I accepted it. It was only right after accepting that job and saying, "Now, how does one carry it out, who are the people involved in it?" that I got to meet John Mims. I asked Wadleigh who were the people involved and he listed Mims. Mims and I met and talked. We had to figure out what were we working on and doing here. One of our first chores was to be involved in admitting the next crop—in fact, one of the largest crops—of African-American students. I think John and others had made many decisions. I had a chance to look at some students in connection with Interphase, as it was coming together.

It was through that, then—as I said, I wanted to meet with some of the students—that I got to meet Shirley Jackson and Jim Turner, who I think were the key leaders of that group at that time, and a young freshman, Fred Johnson, from Texas. I think he came in in '68 as part of a very small group, maybe ten to twenty African-American students. I got to meet that group. They didn't know me and I didn't know most of them. I think over the years we had to develop a working relationship. Part of it is, what do people expect of black administrators and what do black students expect of black administrators? This is an issue that comes to all African-American administrators. You've got to say, "What do people want of you? Whom are you serving? Which way do you serve your community, your own needs, and your institution's needs?"

Anyway, it was through the preparation by directing Interphase that I slowly got to meet this collection of people. Some faculty I knew very much from the chemistry department, but there was a whole new set of faculty and administrators around the institution about whom I knew very little. There was a larger group—still not huge numbers, but certainly a larger group—of African-American students, all of whom were pretty much active. So I got to meet Ken Wadleigh and Paul Gray, who I think might have been assistant dean for student affairs, and shortly after that I think he became the associate dean. Paul ran the freshman advisory program at the time. Alice Seelinger was in that group. Slowly, I met more people in the Medical Department and a group of folks in financial aid.

Financial aid was the one administrative office with which I had had some contact. When I stopped graduate school at one point, I was working for the state government and they didn't take money out of my check. When I came back to MIT, having dropped out of graduate school twice, I did not get an assistantship. They wanted to be sure I was going to stay for a while, so I had to use some of the money I had saved to pay for my tuition and not pay the federal government for taxes. At some point, the federal government came knocking—not quite literally, that would have occurred next, but they at least sent a letter. I got worried about what I would do about it. Then I found out how easy it was to get a loan from the institution. I only had to sign a card. I think it was \$1,400 that I owed the federal government, and I paid it back over the year. That was one of those ways of saying, "Wow, this is a resourceful place—it's a place where help is available if you reach it early enough." And it was a place in which the white folks even provided that level of help.

So I met John Mims and then shortly after that, maybe later the next year, I think, Benjamin Franklin Moultrie came into the Financial Aid office. It wouldn't have been too many more months after that that you came into the Graduate School office. Do you remember what year that was?

*That was 1972.*

So three years later. We didn't have anyone full-time, I guess, in the Graduate School office. They began hiring a number of other people. Don

Palmer was hired in the Medical Department as a psychiatrist. Then they started bringing back to the institution folks to be either hired or brought in as visiting faculty. James Young in physics, a very distinguished fellow, came back. Myra Rodrigues was then hired, I think, in the social work department. So around '72 or '73, we began to have, not large numbers but at least a core, of black administrators and professionals in different areas who could work with each other, talk with each other, and to whom students could come for support. So we really, for the first time, started to have a stronger mixture of people. Nanette Smith came somewhere in the early '70s as well. That was our first time of really having two black administrators in that office.

That was a wonderful beginning. I remember quite well, as people were speaking of a man on the moon for the first time, that Shirley Jackson and I were watching part of that blurry TV in her room in McCormick—just, I think, at the very end of the first successful Project Interphase. We had seen African-American students come in the summer and we had had an excellent team of teachers—a mixture of African-American graduate students, white graduate students, white faculty members, and I think there might have been one or two black instructors. We were very pleased, I think, with what all the students had done. But there was still the question that we had—how well will the black freshmen do when they reach the first classes, and will they be successful in those without the caring support that they had in Project Interphase? And indeed, most of them did do quite well.

It was that set of relationships that I think were often important to me. I spoke to you about how I admired some of the people in chemistry for what they had done, but I had learned from others. I had learned a great deal from Ken Wadleigh and his style of interacting and leading, as well as from Paul Gray, who was only in the dean of students office a short while—I think he then became dean of engineering.

But there was also one group that pulled students, faculty, and administrators together on how, in essence, to fulfill those several points of the demands of the African-American students. That was the Task Force on Educational Opportunity. One of my jobs was to try to keep track of those actions and keep notes of the group. I thought that

Task Force was an excellent team approach. I don't know who set the group up as kind of a high-level organization for administering things, but on it in those days were Jerry Wiesner, who I think was provost at the time, Al Hill from the physics department, Ken Wadleigh, Paul Gray, and other faculty members. The faculty numbers changed a little bit. And there were representatives from the Black Students Union, and they varied from graduate students to undergraduate students. We had a strong mixture there.

I think that group wrestled with some very, very tough decisions—on admission standards, on classes, what type of support should be in offices. One decision it made, that had an impact that I'm not sure people realize, is that these programs were initially set up for African-American students, for blacks at the time. Project Interphase and those other groups were not targeted for Puerto Ricans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. At one point the issue came up of who would be admitted to Project Interphase. Because the opportunity presented itself—and I think there were other factors—a decision was made to include in Interphase some white students whose academic talents were good, like the black students who had been admitted to Project Interphase, but whose educational experiences had been poor, like those of the black students coming to Project Interphase. That decision made by the group—I don't know who first recommended it—I think had far more impact than many people realized.

Let me give you what I think, as I look back, the positive psychological feature was. I think it showed to the black students in Project Interphase that there were other students—white students—who were having the same problems that black students were having. I'm sure it showed the same thing to those white students. They didn't realize black students would be this bright—it was their first experience as well. I'm not sure the students stayed together as friends for a long period of time, but anyway, that decision was made.

Somewhere in the first or second year, this Task Force also made the decision to expand the recruitment as well as the financial aid package for African-Americans to include Hispanic Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans. So as you look now at that issue we talked about earlier, about how the minority community has grown, I don't think people realize that it was a

group focusing exclusively in its earliest stage on African-American students that brought about the changes. More importantly, it was what that small core group of students did following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that brought about the educational opportunity that so many other minorities are now experiencing at MIT.

I don't know if they know it, I don't know if they appreciate it. I wish they would, because they'd be pushing more to try to keep the African-American numbers up. I have a feeling that many of the students who were part of that group may be modest about their own accomplishments and the breadth of what they had changed at MIT and in a nation as a result of responding positively to the tragic assassination of our leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

That group also had its funny moments. There were some pretty militant students in the group. The Faculty Club had an annual event that had a theme for it. The theme for that year—I think this might have been 1970—was something like “A Wild West Show.” Progress on some of those original demands had not been going as well. I can't remember the details of what it was at this time, but the students decided they were going to attend that event—I think it was on a Saturday night—at the Faculty Club. The whites were dressed up in some costumes playing “Wild West” and a group of black students came in. I wasn't there. I don't think they disrupted in any way or destroyed anything, but their very presence certainly changed the atmosphere around here. This would have been the first kind of direct action or sit-in. It would be interesting to see what really happened at the time, what students remember happened at the time. But by that weekend, it set action throughout the place.

Now, there were three or four of us in the black administrative community who had heard that it was happening. I think we learned about it just as it was happening; I don't think we knew about it beforehand. One of the things we figured was that people were going to call us and say, “What do you want to do with these black students over here?” We purposely got together and made ourselves unavailable. We said, “This is a decision that the white people have got to decide on for themselves. If they haven't acted enough, they've got to figure how they're going to respond to it.”

There were no arrests, which we didn't think was going to take place, but by the very next day or so action started to really happen. This brought me into direct experience with another MIT leader whom I greatly admire for many reasons, but also for the way he handled that. That was Howard Johnson, who was president at the time. I wish I could remember his exact words, I wish I had kept a diary about it at the time. His was not an overreaction. In fact, his reaction was not to the incident. He wanted to know what was the cause and what else should we do. It was a kind of candid admission that we hadn't done enough. That's what he sort of charged the group with doing, taking the next steps. That's an indication, I think, of the quality of leadership at MIT from whites at that time—the Ken Wadleighs, the Paul Grays, the Howard Johnsons, and the Jerry Wiesners—that kept things going quite well over long periods of time.

The group had its difficulties and its ins and outs. Some of the meetings were enormously tense. These meetings were usually dinner meetings in the Student Center or some place. I recall at one of them that the students had been very displeased with the amount of progress the place was making, and they decided they weren't going to eat. Everyone else had planned a meal and many of us sat there and ate. But it was very tense when you had one group of people eating and another group of folks glowering at you. So the group conducted some kind of business, I don't know what all happened at the time, and then most left. Then the funny part of it, if you ever just ask some of the students if they remember this, was how quickly the black students then went for the left-over rolls and everything else that was on the buffet table in the back. We all laughed about those aspects of it.

There also were other human moments, to show you how things worked. I'm trying to say all this in a way that's positive, not gossip. People have their insights and they have their emotions, and I hope they can also these days look upon it with a little bit of humor. But racial issues sometimes make it very hard for folks. One of the young men I mentioned to you was Fred Johnson, who came up, I think, from Texas. His freshman advisor, I think, was the late Jerome Wiesner, a man of enormous scientific talent, political accomplishments, liberal leanings, and I think of great compassion toward the African-American movement. A good

deal should be attributed to what he did at the time. He was Fred's advisor and spent a lot of time with Fred. I think Fred had been on Dr. Wiesner's plane, things of that nature.

Well, at this meeting, some incidents occurred and Dr. Wiesner was angry about things that were taking place around him. He claimed that Shirley Jackson had done some of this, and in that case she had not. It was Fred who was charging Dr. Wiesner—not necessarily personally, but the full white leadership—with not fulfilling promises. I think Dr. Wiesner had a hard time believing that somebody that close to him could accuse him of not fulfilling a promise. So finally he turned, if my memory is correct on it, and said, "Shirley Jackson, I know you didn't do it—you put somebody else up to do it on your behalf."

Later Shirley, Fred, and Dr. Wiesner worked together, but it was an indication of the personal interactions which were often very difficult within that group. I've never seen Dr. Wiesner become quite that irrational. He had always shown emotions—good emotions—but that was one in which I said, "This guy is really off-base. He can't quite deal with what's going on here with the young freshmen and sophomores." It's not unusual for youngsters to say their mind in a way that's not that good.

In some ways it was funny, but in other parts it showed how it went. Shirley remained very calm, cool, collected, and on the point of reminding him that she was not the one who had done it—that it was someone else. You could see this enormous talent in her and you could see this growth in a large range of the students who were there. All that came to increase my admiration for Shirley, Jim Turner, Fred Johnson, and the range of students who took leadership positions in the group, including Linda Sharpe.

I remember Jim Banks, who is now in the telecommunications business. I met him at the twenty-fifth celebration of Project Interphase, and I remember how much he had changed. I think he's from Florida. James is perhaps class of '76 or '77 in Course VI.

*He's a vice president of one of the major companies, I think.*

Yes, that's the fellow. He was always a quiet guy, great sense of humor. I don't know if Fred finished MIT. I think he left after a while. I thought many

of the students kept in touch with Shirley, particularly some of the leaders who were there at the time.

We were talking about other people who came back. There was Ron Mickens, the physicist. There was a group of people who may not have been involved officially in the meetings, but who also took part in some of the strategy sessions and some of the reflections. So in many ways, it was a very sizable portion of the black community that made contributions to the various things that took place there.

I'm trying to think of one other funny incident that we had, another incident in terms of how people respond to language. There was a very tough guy by the name of Larry Dean, who came up, I think, from the Philadelphia area. People said that Larry had been with Father Groppe, who, I think, was a priest who worked with a lot of young kids in the Philadelphia area where Larry came from. Larry was a tough guy who had a mouth full of pretty strong words. He was elected to come to one of these Task Force meetings and he encountered there another guy who was pretty tough. Paul Gray did a lot of working out. I'm not sure if he's still doing that, but he was pretty hefty and barrel-chested, as I remember at the time. At one of these meetings the words got strong, the temperature got hot, the language went back and forth, and this guy called Paul an "SOB."

That was the wrong thing to say. I don't think Paul had been called that in a long, long time. So I think he had a moment of adjustment to make. He didn't overreact to it. But I think, like Fred Johnson's comment about Jerry Wiesner, it made people look at some other issues about self and race and relationships that they had probably not expected. I would hope that this amounted to a growing experience for administrators at the high levels of the university, as well as it did for students and those of us who were in the early stages of our careers at that time.

For some in the meeting, it was funny. But it was sad and obscene too, not the kind of thing you really hope to see emulated. That's not what you encourage, not a method with which you encourage African-Americans to negotiate or to talk, but it certainly brought out a different group climate. When you bring folks into your institution, there are some changes that have to occur, maybe even in the way in which language takes place. I think



Larry did some work at Northeastern and someone else told me later he came back to MIT as a master's student or something else.

I talked earlier about relationships between black administrators and black students, and the expectations. One would like to believe that that's an issue solely between African-American students and African-American administrators. But it isn't, which you know so well. Many other people contribute to it.

At one point there was a student, one of our African-American student leaders, who had a leading role in the Black Students Union and who got into some academic difficulty, which is not uncommon at MIT. He had gotten an "incomplete" in a class. He hadn't done all the work in the class, that's probably the best way of putting it, and he had been on probation or warning for one or two semesters before that. If his grades had gotten below some standard, he was going to be asked to leave MIT with the opportunity to apply to come back at a certain time after a semester or so.

He was taking this class—I think it was in engineering, but I'm not absolutely sure of it. I know it was either engineering or math or science. It was not a social sciences or humanities class. The faculty member called me. I was in the dean of students office and the faculty member told me about what had happened in this class. Then he asked me what grade should he give the student. He used the nickname of this young man. I tensed, because I knew I was trapped. First of all, a faculty member shouldn't be asking me what grade to give a student. That's the faculty member's choice. I had been through it enough to be a little bit prepared for it, so I picked up on my desk a grade sheet, a book of regulations, that talked about an "incomplete," what grade should be given for an "incomplete." The regulations at the time were quite clear, that the student should have done the majority of the work on a passing basis in order to receive an "incomplete." If a student had done less than that, they were supposed to get an F or whatever appropriate grade was coming. I mentioned that to the faculty member. He sort of thanked me and that was the end of that conversation.

Later, the Committee on Academic Performance saw the student's grades, acted, and the student was indeed invited to leave the campus for a semester. I think the professor had given him a D

or an F I don't know what it was, but it was certainly not a grade that allowed the student to stay in good standing. The professor didn't give him the "incomplete."

I didn't think too much about it. The student then applied to come back to the institution, having either worked or taken classes elsewhere successfully, and was readmitted to MIT. When he left, he and I had an appropriate working relationship—a good relationship—and I used to see him sometimes and talk to him about his academic work and his political work. But upon returning, he was very cold toward me. Something had happened and I didn't know what it was.

By this time, Nanette Smith had joined the administration. I mentioned it to her and she said, "Yes, he's upset with you because of what you did about his grade, what the professor wrote about the grade." I said, "What do you mean, what the professor wrote about the grade?" So I called up the professor and asked him if he would send me a copy of the letter. He had kept his letters, as accomplished professors do, and he sent me a copy of the letter. And I was shocked at what it said. It was addressed to the student. I think I've got the words pretty good in my mind. I've been repeating them many, many times because it was such a poignant event. The letter said, "After consulting with Dean Bishop, I've decided to give you a grade of ..."

That statement is factually correct. He did call me and he did consult with me, but the student's interpretation was that I made the decision on what the grade should be and I was the one who caused him to be out of the institution. Had I told that faculty member to give him a passing grade or an "incomplete," I don't know if the faculty member would have done it or not. That I can't be sure of. But I do know that what the faculty member did in giving what the student perceived as a negative grade was to pull me into his decision-making in a way that had a very adverse effect on the relationship between me and the student.

Those kinds of no-win situations occur often for both black students and black administrators. The black administrator I was at that time was certainly in a bind. What I would do regularly with faculty members is say, "Here's the situation. Here's the Institute's regulation. Where is the student? What do you want to do about it?" And the

faculty member decides himself what grade to give. But the students expect that no matter what, we as administrators would bail them out and save them. The truth is, though I don't know for certain, that for most undergraduate students—even graduate students—taking that break in their academic work and saying, “Hey, I'm not doing enough on my academic work here, I failed, and I've got to come back and do some things differently” will be a positive event. But most of them don't see it at the time. I don't think I would have seen it myself if I was that student.

So the biggest loss was not to the faculty member, it was really to the student and to me. We lost our relationship with each other. The good part about it was that there was an alternative. There was another black administrator in the office. So the student, if he didn't want to come to me but still wanted to go to someone black, could go to someone else. It's another indication of why that critical mass, even if it's just a choice of one other person, is very important for successes in these areas.

We talked about how the senior administrators dealt with African-American administrators on their way up. Two of our African-American brothers have reached senior ranks—Ike Colbert, the dean of graduate students, and Phil Clay, the associate provost. Those are really good steps. We've said that over these many years there perhaps should have been others. I think we've had one other African-American woman, the previous dean of student affairs, Shirley McBay, who was in that group. But when we look at how people have progressed around the Institute, the record is not so good. I say this now with some sadness, because since our last interview some of those people have passed. I'm not trying to knock folks who have passed by any means, but I'm trying to give a sense of history and how, at least in my mind and perhaps in other people's minds, things function.

One of the things that seemed to be very clear to me was that white administrators cared for some people, mentored some people, and supported them extremely well—and they moved up the ranks. Howard Johnson was a strong supporter and a mentor of the late Constantine Simonides, whom I liked very much and who also played a role, by the way, on the task force and that group. Jim Culliton was, I think, very strongly supported

by John Wynne. I think John has retired. And I'll give you the name of one other person—Kathryn Lombardi, now Kathryn Willmore, who's secretary of the Corporation and vice president. All the people I've named, I think, are very competent. I like them all, I admire them all, and I'm not saying anything against them. But I'm noting that that's an example in a place like MIT where having a strong mentor is very valuable. The question is, has the institution provided those same honest, caring mentorships to African-Americans over the years?

I can say with gratitude and with pride that during the time I was there, I thought Paul Gray, Ken Wadleigh, John Irvine, the folks in chemistry whom I mentioned, and others mentored me in some ways, and I appreciate their having done that. But there's one element of it—and I'm trying to put this in the most sensitive terms I can, because I hope at some point the people I'm going to mention now would read it as my talking to them directly about it—that there's also a need, in turn, to be very direct, to be very honest, and to be very candid with people whom you are mentoring. And whites have got to know that they've got to be very open with African-Americans. Otherwise, whites can become paternalistic and not treat African-American people with full respect.

That's a long way of getting into another story that affected, in a serious way, my relations with some of those administrators whom I deeply admired and still respect. Two of those are Paul Gray and Carola Eisenberg. I worked with each and enjoyed working with them. They were very supportive of me when I decided I wanted to move up in the ranks and try my hand at being head of a student affairs office somewhere. They supported me and they wrote strong letters of recommendation for the places to which I applied. I think that as a result of that, I was able to be the dean of students at Amherst College, a job I love very much. I met my wife when I was at Amherst—another reason, as you can see, why I deeply love that connection and probably wouldn't change it now.

But at the time, I think Dean Eisenberg had been in her position at MIT for several years. None of us thought she would be leaving it. There were, I think, three associate deans—three or four—who left around that time, within a short period of time.

There was Ken Browning, who went out West; Pete Buttner, who has since passed; myself; and, a few years before that, Dick Sorenson. All of us were ambitious guys who wanted to move up and try our hand, and we thought there wasn't going to be a position at all in that post at MIT.

Shortly after I took the position at Amherst College and went out and got started in it, I received a notice and some phone calls saying that Dean Eisenberg had accepted a position at Harvard Medical School—a fine position over there, I think as dean of students. What astounded me, shocked me, disappointed me, and angered me was that neither she nor Paul had given me any clue at the time I was applying and had been offered the position at Amherst College that an opening might have occurred at MIT. What I would have preferred is their saying, “Hey, Jim, an opening is occurring, but I don't think you're ready for it,” or, “An opening has occurred, we're going to have a national search, you may or may not be a successful candidate,” or, “There's no way in the world we'll hire you.” Whatever they were going to say, that would be fine, but at least tell me that that was a possibility, so that I could make in my own way a mature decision about my life.

Paul and I had a conversation about it, and I appreciated that. I think it was very open, very straightforward. It showed me some things. It showed me he was a very caring, competent man who is still wrestling, as we all do, with what you say to people whom you mentor or people you care about or—I'm not sure in this case, because I never had a conversation of this fashion—whether race was an issue in how much he could or could not talk to me about it. Dean Eisenberg and I never had a chance to talk about it. I sent her a very supportive letter about her getting the position at Harvard Medical School, and asked if we could just meet and talk about our new jobs. Part of it, indeed, was my turning to her as a mentor, saying, “How did you succeed in these issues?” Part of it was that I'm sure I wanted to say, “Hey, how come you didn't let me know?” She didn't invite me to talk with her at that point. I subsequently met her as we were both walking across a street in New York City, where I had attended a play. I eventually went over to her house and talked—but not about that, not about that particular issue.

I may never have become the dean of students at MIT, and that's not the issue. I'm very

pleased with where I have been in other jobs. I would have liked the deanship at MIT. Later on, when vacancies came up, people did send a notice to me and ask me if I really wanted to apply, and I made it very clear to them that the job I had already accepted was one I liked, I had made a commitment, and I wanted to stay there. Remember earlier I said that the president, Jerome Wiesner at the time, was having a difficult time dealing with the young sophomore black student and a graduate student, with those personal interactions? Well, here's another case of how an accomplished dean for student affairs with a degree in psychiatry and Paul, who was provost or chancellor at the time, dealt or did not deal with a young black man—myself—with whom they had worked about what my future might or might not be at the place.

It's those small, personal issues that people in all institutions have difficulty with, but I think those of us at MIT have a greater difficulty with. I might not have been as direct as perhaps I should have been with Carola and Paul. In some ways, that's part of this MIT character—we're very busy, we're very active, we can be very accomplished on important, professional, scientific, political issues. But we still have to grasp our dealing with the personal issues. I think you and I have strengthened our relationship over the years. We've had some difficult times, but on the whole we've had good times.

That's one of the other things I want to say in here, that you're part of that same group whom I admire and I thank for what you've done—not just for me, but for the full black community. You're probably the only administrator now who has seen the place almost thirty years straight. In '72, you came in there. Your view would be a really good one—if they're going to have success in those areas where MIT has not had success, with faculty and administrators at top levels—as to what, in addition to the recruitment, the support, the hiring, what personally, what emotional changes may need to occur in the key people for those things to be successful. Part of it would be, I guess, how much openness and caringness can occur.

I'm glad you're doing this. Personally, I just want to know what happened to a lot of people. What are they doing and how do I get in touch with them? I mean, if you had nothing but a list of

where the various people are at this time, that would be helpful. Hearing their reflections of the events that all of us participated in would be a personal joy. But also, I would hope the book can lay a platform, a road map, a guide for how MIT can pick up on the promise it made in the '60s to a small group of African-American students, but really to the Institute itself, and completely fulfill that commitment. MIT can do it. It's a successful place, it's a can-do place. This is an area where it hasn't done it fully, but it still could—for the nation's sake.