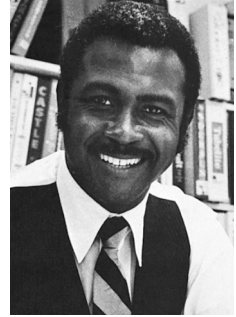


HARVEY B. GANTT

b. 1943, BArch 1965 (architecture) Clemson University, MCP 1970 (city planning) MIT; lecturer, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1970-1972; principal, Gantt Huberman Architects; member, City Council, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1975-1979; mayor pro tem, 1981-1983; two-term mayor, 1983-1991; Democratic candidate for US Senate from North Carolina, 1990 and 1996 (against Republican incumbent Jesse Helms); chair, National Capital Planning Commission; life member, NAACP; recipient, Citizen of the Year Award, Charlotte Chapter of NAACP, 1975, 1984; Martin Luther King, Jr., visiting professor, MIT, 1999-2000.

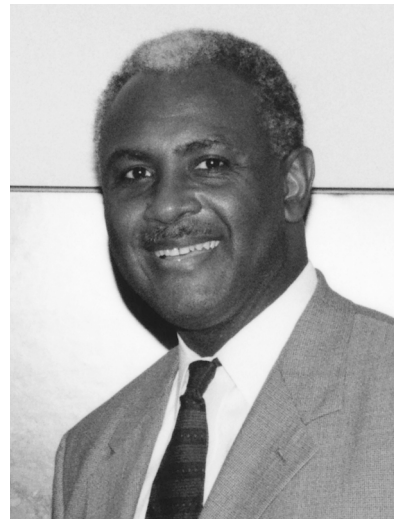


I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. I was born in Charleston County. My father and mother moved quickly to Charleston prior to my first birthday. They moved into government housing—what we know today as public housing, but housing primarily built because of the war effort in 1943. I was born in '43 and they moved in '44 to Charleston. I lived in this public housing for the first five years of my life, playing in a neighborhood of working-class kids who lived in the projects. All of our fathers, as near I could recall, worked at something called the Navy Yard, which of course I learned later was in fact a major defense establishment geared to World War II. My father didn't get drafted because he was the oldest son in the family. For some reason they didn't take him for the war effort, so he ended up working in the war industries.

I ended up having four sisters, three of whom were born in that housing project. My father was a great reader, an avid reader, although he had only an eighth-grade education. He taught himself carpentry, as he worked in that Navy Yard, and picked up side jobs in the evenings and weekends doing carpentry work with a small black contractor. That led ultimately to his buying a plot of land in a small, salt-of-the-earth, working-class neighborhood. He moved my mother and my three sisters and myself to this very small house that he started building. I started helping him to build even back then as a six-year-old kid—just standing outside watching him, holding the lumber, maybe steady-ing it, calling myself getting involved. My father built the house with his own hands. Years later—as

we, his children, grew older—he added to that house, and I've often said that that might have been my inspiration to be an architect. Indeed, it represented my first instincts about how something went together.

We lived in this Charleston community and stayed there for the balance of my childhood. My parents still live there and I still go back. I suppose I had pretty much an average childhood. My parents sent me to kindergarten. I'm always amazed that they were able to send me to a private kindergarten back then. Daddy was still working two jobs, and there were three other sisters and later a fourth sister to come along. But they managed. Because they put education so high on their agenda, they managed to afford to send us all to this little kindergarten that was in the neighborhood. I would suppose that the tuition was probably not



Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Harvey B. Gantt in Charlotte, North Carolina, 20 July 1998.

terribly expensive. The good thing is that we got a good foundation, such that when we first went to public school, I felt very prepared. I did well in elementary school and in high school. We didn't have a junior high in those days. Elementary schools went from first to seventh grade, and then from eighth grade on you were in high school. But I did well and joined a lot of clubs and organizations. So did my sisters. My parents were very much engaged in the activities of the school. The school was three or four blocks from our house. All of my sisters did well, academically and in terms of involvement in social clubs. Also, I was an athlete in high school and played on the football team.

I suppose a lot of people ask the question, "Growing up in the segregated South, when did you first become aware of race?" But interestingly enough, we lived in our segregated community and most of us never can remember that as being a negative experience. We got to see the black doctor, the black druggist, the black preacher. Our parents we always questioned, how did these people get to be what they are and drive these nice big cars and live in these very nice houses which were right around the corner from our small house? But little did we realize that we were developing tremendous incentives to achieve, because the standard response that we got from our parents was that those black professionals had gotten an education, had gone past high school and on to college. So going to college became a natural kind of thing for a lot of us who lived in those neighborhoods at that time. Many of us ultimately couldn't go, but that was always seen as the goal—to do something and to do better than our parents did, and they wanted us to.

But race became an issue in 1954 for me, when the Supreme Court said segregation was unconstitutional.¹ Only then did I realize that we had been passing white institutions—like the white elementary school—to go the additional blocks to our elementary school, or that we sat at the back of the bus and never questioned it because that was just the way people did things. But when '54 came, it changed the lives of a lot of kids and our perspective and our outlook.

Do you recall what age you were?

1. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas: Brown*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

I was eleven. I was an eleven-year-old kid who was in the sixth or seventh grade, but I remember that decision. I can remember the headlines even today, "Segregation Unconstitutional." The first thing I wanted to ask my mother was, "What does that mean?" Of course, she told us what it meant and my father reinforced what it meant. I started reading everything I could about it because I was seeing how the community was reacting. White people obviously didn't like it, from what I was reading, and black people thought this was a great day for some reason.

But nothing much changed in my life past that point. I mean, we didn't change any of our customs. We continued to go to the same schools and, as a matter of fact, I graduated from segregated institutions. The one big change was in our senior year, in 1960, when sit-ins started to occur in Greensboro at A&T State University, A&T College at that time. A group of kids in the high school, led by myself and two other student leaders, decided we would go sit down at lunch counters too, without telling our parents. We got into the act, demonstrated, sat at a lunch counter, got arrested and all the hoopla associated with that. But it was the best political statement we could make prior to graduating, that we understood that times were going to be a-changing.

This was in South Carolina.

This was South Carolina, this was Charleston. Little did I realize that that move would have an impact on my life later on. Let's just say that I ultimately ended up getting out of jail, as my twenty-seven other colleagues did, and we all ended up graduating from school. Later on the Supreme Court wiped that conviction off the books with their decision that our right to sit down at a lunch counter was in fact constitutional. But it was my first brush with the civil rights movement and I think changed my life substantially after that period.

With education being so imprinted from your family, from your mother and father especially, where did you go to undergrad school and how did that decision come about?

Well, I had great guidance counselors, who when they discovered that I wanted to be an architect—and I discovered that in about the ninth grade—didn't discourage me by saying that there are not a lot of black architects. They told me about the

schools that I could go to: Howard University, Tuskegee, A&T. But I had one guidance counselor who said, "Look, 99.4 percent of all the architects in America are white, and what you ought to do is take a chance and go study at an integrated institution. You ought to leave the South and go study somewhere else. You've got the brains to do that and you'll be successful." She kept encouraging me to do that, and ultimately I chose Iowa State University. I was a National Achievement Merit Scholar and got a scholarship to go to school out there. That, along with some student loans, allowed me to go to Iowa State. My family did not earn a substantial amount of money, although my father was determined to send us to school. We all knew we had to work and we all knew that scholarships would only partially help us.

I chose Iowa State and only stayed there two years. The cold weather didn't agree with me. Being a child of the South, I needed to come out and go somewhere else. I was motivated then to say, "Why not Clemson?" Remember now, I had already been introduced to the civil rights movement to some extent. I had observed Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter going to the University of Georgia in 1961, while I was a student at Iowa State University. I envied them, that they could now go to school in their home state of Georgia. "Why couldn't I go to Clemson?" So I applied to Clemson University. I did that in the latter part of my freshman year—that was 1961—and after going through the federal courts, they admitted me to Clemson. I was the first African-American student to go to Clemson University, the first African-American student in South Carolina to go to an all-white school. There was a lot of hoopla associated with that because James Meredith had just gone to the University of Mississippi the semester before I entered. Meredith went in September of '62 and the courts admitted me in January of 1963.

So I became the first African-American student, studying architecture there. I finished my undergraduate years in '65 at Clemson.

That's trailblazing.

I think one of the motivating things for me was, when I went there the first day, they said, "Oh, leave this kid alone. He's determined to get into Clemson. If he stays there long enough, he'll flunk out because architecture is a pretty tough course."

That just made me more determined that I was going to succeed. I graduated with honors in 1965.

Not only did you finish, but you finished with honors.
With honors, yes. I was third in my architecture class. I was very pleased about that. My wife, also, was the first African-American co-ed to go to Clemson. She came a year after me. I always tease her about the fact that she saw this good-looking guy in the news clips and decided she was going to go join him, get him somebody to date. She obviously didn't graduate from Clemson, because when I left Clemson she left with me to move to Charlotte. We came to Charlotte after graduation. She finished her education at the University of North Carolina. I interned with a local architectural firm until I won a HUD fellowship to MIT. That's how I got to MIT in 1970.

Let me ask a question about the experience at Clemson, though, before you get to MIT. That was a very pivotal period in terms of your education and also, probably, a tremendous example for other blacks in the state especially. Did you stay on campus and how was that experience, being the only black male?

The only black on the campus for a while, for a year. It was a good experience. It wasn't nearly as bad as people thought it would be. I had prepared myself, I think, for some isolation—expecting that, expecting that students would not want to associate with me because of the notoriety, so to speak, that I had gained by crashing those barriers. But I found that I made friends rather easily in the School of Architecture. The professors were fair—some not friendly but fair, all of them were fair. Most of the students campus-wise, a campus at that time of only about seven or eight thousand students, were pretty much indifferent to my being there. I guess if you asked them whether they wanted me being there, they probably would have said no, that that was breaking a tradition that they held dear or their parents held dear. There were a few people who wanted to be negative, but I never encountered the kinds of things that some of my colleagues—peers, at least—at Georgia and at Alabama had encountered, in part because those other incidents had occurred prior to my going to Clemson. The state of South Carolina, from the governor on down, had made it very clear that they were not going to ruin their prospects of growth and development by having the kind of

thing that occurred in Mississippi, with the federal troops coming in. That passed all the way down to the president of the college, who said that any student caught out of line dealing with Harvey Gantt would in fact be summarily dismissed from school. So their manners were appealed to, more than anything else. Students had to stay in line because of the administration picking up a lesson from what happened in Mississippi. That inured to my benefit, and to the benefit of my future wife who came and got similar kind of civil treatment. We made a lot of friends at Clemson, life-long friends there both on the faculty and students I went to school with. In later years I went back to lecture and I received an honorary doctoral degree.

So that experience turned out positive. Today at Clemson, maybe at least twelve percent of its student body is African-American. I would say around a thousand-and-some students, twelve hundred.

That's a little higher than a lot of schools.

Yes, but thirty-three percent of the state's population is African-American, too. But it is a high percentage as compared to what you're finding in universities. Every time I see the kids in engineering and architecture, I have to feel pretty good about the fact that that legacy lives on and that kids are going to do well there.

Let me come back to MIT, then. How did you happen to come there? Reflect on your overall experience at MIT, particularly after so many very unusual experiences you had had before coming there.

First of all, I chose MIT because I thought it had a very good program in city planning and urban planning. I had decided—after the ending of my internship, three years here in Charlotte—that I wanted a bit more education, a master's degree at least but not a doctorate degree. I used to kid Phil Clay about this all the time. We both came out of North Carolina, but he was looking to teach one day and wanted a Ph.D. I said, "Man, I couldn't stay here that long. I'd go crazy being a scholar." But I wanted a master's degree in planning to complement my architecture degree. I wanted to work in cities and wanted to understand that work. Among the best schools in the country, MIT stood out. I applied and also applied for a HUD fellowship at that time. By now I had a wife and baby and needed some help. I got the fellowship and matriculated to MIT.

Totally different world, different from going to Clemson. Small town was Clemson, in the hills of South Carolina. Here we were in the hub of New England, Boston—you know the scene. I'll never forget. My wife kept expecting that Cambridge was going to be similar to Clemson or Chapel Hill, and what it was like was just an extension of the Boston metropolitan area. We had to make an adjustment to living in this highly urbanized area. Even though we had lived in Charlotte for three years, it's a relatively small town comparatively speaking to that area. So we adjusted. This was no new experience to go to an integrated school, but one of the most immediate things we noticed was the amount of protests going on at MIT and other places—the unrest.

What year was this?

This was 1968 and there was a tremendous amount of political turmoil. We saw all kinds of demonstrations in the streets. I became recruited to be a member of the Black Students' Union at MIT, with people like Shirley Jackson—who later made a name for herself at Bell Laboratories—and all those people. Phil and all of us were asked to come in and be a part of this. We used to go to meetings and listen to angry young black folks—many of them were younger than we were, because I had already been out of college three years—who were going to take over the administration building at MIT to make the faculty more responsive to the needs of black students. An interesting time.

It was a very tough time.

Such that when I read about some of the kinds of things we hear about today, some things still are the same, although I'm sure life must be better than it was back in '68. I got involved with that, but I had a kind of detachment. I used to see myself at BSU meetings being a person who folks looked to as a kind of elder person in the room, "Does that make any sense?" Some students were aware of my political history—being a first, a pioneer in the South. I used to notice a distinct difference between the Northern students and the Southern students. I used to share that with them. Southern students were much more hopeful about a better day coming, because they had seen and been participants in major social change in the region of the country that they had come from. So coming North and seeing some of the

things that existed here, we didn't think things were so bad. We had not felt the so-called hypocrisy of the majority race at that point. We thought up North, by right and by law, all men were created equal. So there was not the cynicism in Southern students. Again, we had this history of defeating problems in large measure. Recall now, by this time the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act had all passed and we were electing black officials to office.² So we went there with positive attitudes that we could conquer the world, whereas many of my colleagues and friends from New York and Boston and other places were substantially more cynical about what life was like there. They did not take faculty on face value when they complained, whereas we did. We assumed that they were going to make a sincere effort to make things better.

Life was tough in the sense that there was academic rigor at a place like MIT. I was always amazed at some of the kids who either studied very hard—and you wondered about the balance in their lives—and those who thought that they could scare their way through MIT by asking for all kinds of concessions during this period of political ferment. “I’m black, you know, and you can’t discriminate against me. Therefore, I don’t have to do that homework as much, and that’s not relevant.” So many things in that day and time were “not relevant.” But it was an exciting time, I suppose, to be in school. Those two years we saw some tremendous turmoil in the country—the assassination of King and Kennedy, the second Kennedy that is,³ and all the riots that took place as a result of that, the Vietnam war marches, what had happened at the Democratic convention in Chicago in 1968. It was one hell of a year to be a student because there was just so much going on.

Do you remember where you were when you heard that Martin Luther King, Jr., had been killed?

I was still living in Charlotte. I went to MIT in August of 1968. Well, I was going there all summer to get a place. I left my job in May, but I was still here in North Carolina. Do you know what I was doing? I was actually in Columbia, South Carolina, taking an architectural exam to be a licensed architect. I heard this news and watched a

lot of the stuff on television. I was finishing up an exam and becoming a licensed architect.

What experience would you say was really the best that you would say about MIT and what would you say was the worst?

Without any question, the best thing about MIT—and it still is prevalent today—is that you got to run into such fine minds, the intellectual vigor and energy they have, so many smart people. That’s a very stimulating environment for a confident person. It can also be a very intimidating environment. Some of my peers thought that that was what was wrong with it; I happened to find that it was exciting to be on a campus and sometimes take a course from somebody who was a Nobel laureate or someone who was nominated to be or someone who had won a major award. For me, I wanted to soak up everything I could from all these smart people. It was always exciting to me to be in a class with people who had written the latest book on housing or on political science. Or the latest book on city planning. Kevin Lynch—to be sitting in a course taught by a guy whose book was revered around the world. This was heady stuff. This meant something. The other part of it was this ability to take courses at Harvard, MIT, Boston University. I mean, if you were a student and a scholar, this had to be the environment to be in. To always sit there with people and they were always thinking, we could get into a deep discussion. If you were verbal, it was a great time—I mean, if you were the kind of person who wanted to talk.

The worst part of the experience to me was, in fact, that you could think that the whole world was like that. So it’s really the underside of the same thing. I spent time during the summer working at Harvard Medical School in their planning office, because I was a trained architect, just to earn a living. I spent another summer, a second summer, working in Roxbury in the middle of the black community. I saw how distant from the black community those worlds were, the medical school and MIT’s planning department. In that first year I could go to the sherry hour on Fridays with the faculty and hob-nob with those folks, but a lot of what happened there didn’t have much to do with reality. And so, with all of this brain power, why aren’t we solving some of these problems right around us? I guess I got annoyed with those of us

2. Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965.

3. Robert F. Kennedy.

who were doing the theses—whether it was a master’s or Ph.D.—who went in to do analysis in these communities, but not always leaving behind anything of value to the folks who needed a lot of help. I was tempted at the end of my years in Boston by a number of people who wanted me to stay. I was tempted to stay, and I probably could have done well living up there, but I thought that I wanted to be in a world less academically oriented, where there was a little bit more normalized environment, where we could attack and deal with the problems that we had to deal with. The South, obviously, always beckoned to me. So I came back.

That’s a really excellent example, what you have said you liked best and perhaps some of the things that you did not like so much about MIT. My wife and I have been in the Boston-Cambridge area for twenty-five years, and we just recently—I’d say in the last three years—started coming back home, since both of us are from North Carolina. One of the things that you mentioned I wanted to get your opinion on, and that is, the South versus the New England area in terms of people—just the living. From our perspective, we love coming back home now simply because there is a Southern hospitality. We experienced it when we were growing up. Then to be away so long, and then you come back and you really say, “I really now understand.” What could you say about that?

Well, I think there are these cultural differences. There are these geographical differences between North and South, in this case New England and the South—or North Carolina. I’ve gotten accustomed to and I still am accustomed to walking around shaking hands and greeting everybody I meet down here. People are friendlier, white and black. Black people more so, but white folks here are friendlier too. They will say hello to you and they are very hospitable to you. You go into a business establishment and people are generally friendlier. Sometimes my friends from the North are shocked by that, because their image of the South often still is colored by the segregation days. I explain that like James Baldwin explains it, which is that in the South black folks and white folks live so relatively close together—and their history is so intertwined together—that they feel like they know each other and they’re never off each other’s minds. So even though we used to “know our place”—it’s a strange thing to say—there was just this civility, this relationship that we had. Now it’s

better. Let me tell you why it’s better: because a lot of folks are realizing that we have to strip off that patina of racism that held the whole region back. In the past, they were trying to hold blacks down and really keep the whole region back. With the legal-social and political structure changing so dramatically, coupled with healthy economic growth, there is a new positive outlook. And yet we haven’t lost the things that folks used to say were good about the old South. “Y’all come see us now, how y’all doing?” That’s still a part of us here on the street. Where high finance and big business are existing side by side, you still have that kind of environment of courtesy and warmth and friendliness. That’s what’s attracting many of my friends back to the area.

They say, “Yes, things are breaking down. Harvey, you ran against Jesse Helms in 1990 and 1996 and lost by only three or four percentage points? Wait a minute, this is the South! That ain’t supposed to happen.” Yes, it is, and it will happen. I mean, there’s racism still here. It’s here, but it’s not a legal thing any more and those who want to be on the progressive side know that things have changed. You don’t have that kind of discrimination and yet you’ve kept this kind of folksiness and civility—particularly in North Carolina, in Charlotte, cities like this where you don’t have the isolation of central city to suburbs. In North Carolina, everything that looks like a city becomes a part of the big city. Our school system is a unitary school system. There are not ten school systems in Mecklenburg County. There’s only one and everybody’s vested. Everybody’s kid has got to go there. So if we’re going to bus kids, we’re going to bus them equitably. That’s what our fight is all the time. If we’re going to educate the kids, we’re going to have to educate all of them. Now, middle-class people don’t pull out of the system and leave it just to being the poor kids, such as what we see in major American cities today. There’s more of a we’re-in-this-boat-together kind of thing. The President started that community race and issue thing—racial dialogue—and “Charlotte goes ten steps better,” you know. It forms a huge committee of folks. If you read the paper yesterday, you’ll see we’re talking about what we can do to improve ourselves from the standpoint of race relations.

So as Baldwin said, when it gets around to trying to deal with the race problem, perhaps the place that it’s going to happen best is going to be

in the South, where they are so close to each other and where the wounds have been so deep and where the healing probably can occur best—as opposed to maybe the more impersonal North, where legally we’re equal but one group of folks live over here, you live over somewhere else, and you really don’t have much to do with each other.

You have done something that’s pretty much unheard of in terms of not only running two campaigns against one of the most powerful senators in America but actually coming close to winning. What have you learned that you could pass on to the next generation about what you’ve learned in terms of being able to deal and work in a situation like that, to run a campaign—a major campaign in this country—against one of the most powerful senators in the country? What have you learned about that as a public figure?

Well, I know that politics is rough. But you know, I got into politics a long time ago, when I was about thirty-two years old. I became a member of the Charlotte City Council by being appointed to fill out an unexpired term. I took to it like a duck takes to water. I really enjoy this business of public policymaking. It seemed to delve in with a lot of what I’ve tried to do professionally—trying to work to build a better city, to plan a better city. So there was some relationship between what happened in the city government and what I was doing to earn a living. I enjoyed it. Plus, I enjoy people. I love people and I like this notion that we can be involved in making things happen. I always did believe that you can change things. Again, that’s out of that civil rights movement where we saw change occur. Little people all got together and changed society.

So that notion convinced me to keep going in politics. I got into the Helms races after tremendous success at the local level: council member, then vice-mayor, then mayor. Then I moved on to run for the Senate against Jesse Helms, and it was a totally different ball game. I mean, politics by this point had become much more mean-spirited. In fact, I lost the mayor’s office running for a third term against a candidate who was playing what we call hard-ball politics then—the politics of personal attacks, the politics of divisiveness. I didn’t like it in ’87 when I lost that race. I absolutely did not believe that a Jesse Helms best represented my vision of what the future was going to be and what I thought to be millions of others in the state who

thought otherwise. So we devised a campaign that was high-powered, that became national in its scope only because Senator Helms spent so much money in his campaigns until any opponent—unless they’re going to be just totally drowned out—could not be taken seriously unless they raised a relatively adequate supply of dollars. We campaigned all across America. The race had appeal because we were two people who had equal and opposite convictions about what the future was going to be.

I guess my lesson to a lot of people is you need to really stand up for what you believe in. I grew up in the South that way. I have parents who felt that way, who thought that education was important and did everything that they could to insure their kids could get that opportunity. Cindy and I did the same thing raising our four children. Here I was running as a mature man, at that time forty-seven years old, against a senator who had spent eighteen years at that point basically fighting against the very kinds of things that I was raised to believe in: equal opportunity in education, the right for people to go as far as their abilities would carry them. He had had a record that actually fought against that. So I got up and ran on my conviction and asked a lot of other people to support me, and millions of others did. Now, we didn’t win the election, neither one of them. The same narrow margin kept us from winning each time. But my sense is that I’m more right about what the future of North Carolina and America has to be than Jesse Helms is.

So there is value in that. Now what I’m trying to do is to get other people—who are younger, with greater energy, with more fire in their belly—to believe that they can make changes that are meaningful, that they can run against the Jesse Helmses of the world and be successful, notwithstanding the fact that right now my party may in this particular region of the country be the minority party in many cases, Democrats against Republicans. But I do believe that we learned a lot of things. One of them is, of course, stand up for what you believe in. Then plan carefully how you’re going to carry something through to the end and then carry it through to the end. I mean, be focused on it.

Two other quick questions. One is related, in fact, to the last statement you made. I try to ask it particularly of

those of you who really have a life that will show and give examples. Based on your own experience, is there any advice you might offer to other young blacks who would be either entering a place like MIT or just, say, starting out like you started out? I know that you have not only answers based on your own life, but also as far as your own children and everything else is concerned. What kind of advice would you give young, black, bright men and women whom we attract, for example, at MIT? What advice would you give them coming in as these very bright freshmen that I see coming in, and sophomores, or even the first-year graduate student? As you said, we're getting the best that we have around in the country in their particular disciplines. But they don't have the experience of a person like you. What advice would you give a person coming into a profession like that?

Well, first of all, they ought to be proud of themselves that they made it to an elite institution like MIT. That already sets them apart from the average out there. They ought to congratulate themselves on being as good as they are. But then I would hasten to add, "You'd better not rest on your laurels, or what is a moment of triumph will become a moment of shame so quickly. The world is changing and things are moving so fast that you are going to have to continue to work to prepare yourself for ever greater challenges." When I was a kid coming along, when I made that A on that exam, the next challenge was to prepare to make the A on the next exam. You cannot rest on your laurels. I couldn't have been very comfortable being a guy who could walk around for the rest of my life saying, "You know, I was the first African-American to go to Clemson University," and just try to live on that particular thing—something that happened thirty-something years ago. But once there, the challenge was to finish with honors. Then after that, the challenge was to become a great architect. After that, the challenge was one thing after the other. It's to keep finding challenges to stimulate that very fine brain that you've got up there, because we rarely use it. So don't ever think that you've reached the top. Success is always a process of moving, moving up.

Then third I would say that other people are looking at you. I don't mean just faculty and administrators or your peer students, but there's somebody in some community you left who says, "John or Mary was smart enough to get into MIT." So whether you like it or not, you're carrying a little bit of a burden. Wear it lightly, but it is

a burden that says, "Other people are looking at me to succeed, and I can do it." Finally, don't ever give up. I don't care how hard the papers get or how much you find out you don't know. Once you get there, there are going to be periods when you're at school there that you will discover—as smart as you are—you don't know a whole lot. Don't ever give up on yourself. Never give up.

You have seen a lot in terms of education, particularly educational institutions and including MIT. Are there any suggestions you would make to improve them? Are there some things that you think would help to improve or enhance the experience of blacks in schools like MIT, from the administrative level?

The usual thing we would say on something like that is, black people—young people—coming into school need to see more of their people in the administration, on the faculty, in the staff positions. It makes for a more comfortable environment for the black youngster. See, there's no question in my mind that being black in America anyway carries an extra burden. I'm a pretty good architect in my own right, and yet any time there is a job out there to be gotten I have to carry another burden—however lightly—on my shoulders when I go into the room competing against my peers, who ninety-nine percent of the time are all-white groups. Will, in fact, these people who are making the decision make their decision simply on the basis of my abilities, or will they make it on the basis of the color of my skin? As advanced as I have gotten over all these years, there is still that question that lurks back there. The question is, are you going to be defeated by that knowledge? That's just a fact of life of living in America.

But on campuses like MIT and Harvard and the other elite places, to the extent that they can make the institutions as comfortable as possible for their African-American students, I think there is a direct correlation on how well those students perform in those institutions and their feelings about those institutions when they leave them. Why do I say that? I did see a lot of folks back thirty years ago who hated MIT when they left too. They thought it was racist, thought that they didn't get a fair shake, that people never cared about their problems, nobody understood. Schools can't ignore that. Society is designed, in the majority culture such as we have here, to really accommodate that majority culture so that people feel more

comfortable. But what can schools do to make the place more comfortable for blacks? Well, it certainly can recruit vigorously for top faculty people when they can find them. It certainly can try to find administrators. It certainly can try to provide places and environments that allow folks to vent and to feel as if they're being listened to, making the environment comfortable for the folks.

I run an architectural firm. We have a very diverse firm here—whites, blacks, men, women. The job of the manager of this place is, if I want these people to be very productive for me, I don't go around as a tyrant saying, "Because I pay you X amount of dollars, I expect you to get that work done." I try to make that environment as comfortable as possible for all the people there. I will try to be as sensitive as I can to all the diversity that exists out there. What I don't know, I bring somebody in who does know what will make this place—what will keep morale high, what will keep folks producing. Well, I think educational institutions have the same responsibility. You're bringing in raw material, you're wanting to train and hone those minds, and you have to make the environment as comfortable as possible. It can be very intimidating to bring in a kid with 165 IQ intelligence who comes from a small, rural community, who needs a lot of exposure, but who has got the raw materials to be honed into maybe a brilliant scientist. How do you make him more comfortable in that world and not lose him?

It couldn't be said better.

I've been there.