

HUBERT E. JONES

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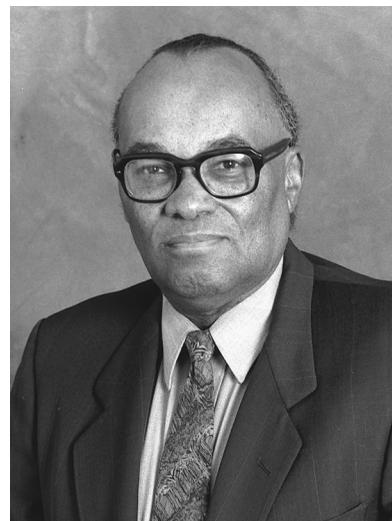
I grew up in the South Bronx in New York. My father was a Pullman porter, my mother starting out was a housewife. I had five sisters, three older and two younger, so I was in the middle. My mother, after I was out of high school, went back to high school to get an academic high school degree. She had graduated from a high school in Pittsburgh with a secretarial degree and had been a secretary prior to getting married, but she did not have an academic high school degree. So she went back and got a high school degree with my two younger sisters. They graduated at the same time from the same high school. Then she went part-time to Hunter College in New York and got a BA degree over seven years, while she was working in the kitchen in a child-care center in our neighborhood. After she got her BA degree, she came out of the kitchen and got a job as a nursery school teacher in a child-care center. She went back to Hunter College and got a master's degree in early education. When she finished her master's degree, going part-time, they made her a supervising teacher. At age seventy-one, she was forced to retire.

She was a determined woman.

Determined, yes. My father, as a Pullman porter, was very involved with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the union, was referred to as "the chief" by my father. So I heard a great deal about the union and a great deal, in my growing up years, about A. Philip Randolph. In fact, A. Philip Randolph gave the eulogy at my father's funeral.

Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Hubert E. Jones in Dorchester, Massachusetts, 1 October 1998.

My father went to Lincoln University in Missouri. He was class valedictorian and was really headed towards medicine. He had a job on the railroad during the summers. That's how he got into the Pullman Company, a porter's job being one of the better jobs for black men at that time. Then he married and got diverted from pursuing his ambition to become a doctor. He was probably the smartest person I ever knew in terms of raw brain power. He was an unofficial "lawyer" for the union on a volunteer basis. He represented porters who got into trouble while carrying out their jobs. He would put their cases together, go with them before the company, and advocate for them. Somebody would be charged with stealing or messing with a passenger or whatever, so I'd hear all the stories of his battles with Pullman Company management who were trying to get rid of



employees. It was his outlet for using his brain power and talents not required to carry out his menial job.

Now what years are we talking about, approximately?
My father died in 1961, and I knew most about it during the '40s and '50s.

South Bronx, for a teenager, was a tough neighborhood—decaying, deteriorating, overrun with youth gangs, drugs and the like—but there were still a lot of solid, stable families who had been there from the '40s. Somehow I was able to navigate through the minefields of the South Bronx. What was a good thing was that the institutions worked in those days, even in poor neighborhoods. The public schools achieved good educational outcomes for students. The park department, where I played basketball, was supervised and well maintained. The parks worked. The settlement houses worked. It was another refuge. You knew that if you could get into some of the solid social institutions that were operating, you could keep yourself on a straight path.

The other thing that was present was the City College of New York. You knew that if you kept your act together academically, a great, free college education would be available to you. When I went to City College of New York starting in 1951, it was tuition-free. During my four years, the most I paid was a hundred dollars in lab fees for chemistry or biology courses. You had to buy your own books, but once you bought them you then traded them for the next round of classes.

And you're talking about a first-class institution, too.
Yes, no question. I got a first-class education. I would say one of the biggest impacts on me in terms of my development, and really the model I try to live out in academia, is Dr. Kenneth Clark. Dr. Kenneth Clark, the famous psychologist, was my professor for introductory psychology at the City College of New York when I was a sophomore. It was at the time that he was preparing as well as arguing the brief before the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*. He had pulled together social scientists to put together the social science brief to prove that separation of the races in public schools was psychologically harmful to black children. The Court had never taken a social science brief before. Dr. Clark would come into class and say, "Well, this is our argument—this is what we're saying before the

Supreme Court. It's never been done before, what do you think?" He'd go down to the court and argue, and he'd come back and tell us about it.

So I had in Ken Clark a model of an academic who was engaged in fighting for social justice. I saw a man who used the academic base to gain tremendous credibility and standing and stature, and then to take that standing and that stature to make progress—waves, if you will—in the community, in the society. I would say that during my undergraduate education, Ken Clark was a big, big figure. He also had an impact on how I ultimately taught courses in social work when I got into academia, which I never thought I was going to do. MIT was the cause of me getting into academia.

Probably the other big thing that happened for me at City College was a sociology course I had to take. There was a requirement in the course that every student had to do an internship in a community-based service organization. I decided to do an internship in a community center in a public school in my neighborhood in the South Bronx. I worked with a group of young latency age kids in a social club, activity club, under the supervision of a professional social worker who had graduated from Case Western in Cleveland. She talked with me about, "Well, you're really doing good work. Why don't you think about social work as a career?" I had gone to college pretty much thinking I was going to be a public school teacher. I had come out of a public school-teaching family. My older sisters were school teachers, some of my younger sisters were school teachers.

Part of the family tradition.

Yes, and I was sort of drifting that way. It was as a result of that experience, as an intern under a professional social worker, that I changed my career focus. My experiences at the Ethical Culture School Camp in Cooperstown, New York, also moved me in this direction. I was a counselor there, and my gift for working with kids—I particularly worked with kids in groups—was clear. There were some social workers there who kept saying, "Why don't you think about social work as a career?" I then ultimately moved that way, because I also saw social work as part of a profession that was about societal change. All of that added up to me moving the way of social work.

By the time I was a junior at the City College of New York, it was clear to me that I wanted to

be a professional social worker. I started then thinking about what graduate schools of social work I would apply to. I knew I wanted to get out of New York. I applied to Boston University and to Case Western in Cleveland, because they were the best schools for social group work. I got into both places and, by a fluke, I decided to come to Boston. My initial plan was to go to Cleveland because that was the best school of social work for training social group workers. They had the giants in group-work scholarship there. But there was a friend of the family in Cambridge, where I could get almost free room and board, and it was a lot closer to home.

That's how I got to Boston. After I got my master's degree, I decided I wanted to stay here. I was offered a job here, got married. We both decided we wanted to make our lives in Boston.

What was the first job you got offered after you finished?
In my second year as a social work student, my internship was at the Boston Children's Service Association, which at that time was on Beacon Hill on Walnut Street, the corner of Walnut and Beacon Street, up near the State House. They offered me a job. My supervisor decided to leave and take another job, so a job opened up and they asked me if I would be interested. I said yes. I worked for the Boston Children's Service Association for about six years, doing group work with physically handicapped and emotionally disturbed children.

You knew what you wanted to do.

Well, I finally figured it out. By the time I was a junior, it was clear to me that social work was the place. By the time I graduated from college, I had this notion in my head that I wanted to be a leader, that I wanted to be somebody who made a difference. I had no idea of how it would ever play out, but I got that from family and a whole set of things.

I guess the next biggest thing that happened to me was when I got to Boston, the first semester I was here. In '55, in December, I went to a Ford Hall Forum program, which was then held at Jordan Hall, where Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke. He had been signed up to speak at the Ford Hall Forum months before December. The day he was to speak was one week after the Montgomery bus boycott started, so it wasn't clear he was going to come. But he kept the commitment. I got over

to Jordan Hall about an hour and a half before, because I knew that everybody and his mother was going to be there. The place was jammed, but I got there early and I got me a terrific seat near the front, right in the middle. Martin Luther King, Jr., walked onto the stage, was introduced, got up without a note, and out came this extraordinary oratory. I was blown away. I can still remember walking from Jordan Hall down Huntington Avenue back to Massachusetts Avenue to get a bus back to Cambridge, and I felt like my feet weren't even touching the ground. Dr. King had elevated me to a new level. I've never been the same since that experience. I would say that's another marker.

The other marker that happened during college was this camp I worked at, the Ethical Culture School Camp in Cooperstown, run by the Ethical Culture Schools and the Ethical Culture Society out of New York. It was like a microcosm of an ideal society that I've never experienced before or since. It was an interracial, co-ed camp that had a set of values that were practiced, that were quite compelling, and that played a role in shaping my world view, I would say. The camp was for children, ages nine to fifteen. That's where I met my wife. We met when we were both counselors, but she had been a camper there because she went to the Ethical Culture Schools in Fieldston, New York.

I would say the Ethical Culture School Camp was the closest thing to living in an ideal society. I remember one time I asked a group of students I was working with, "Have you had any experiences that would give you an idea of what it would be like to live in an ideal society?" As they went around answering the question, I finally said for myself, "Oh yeah, Ethical Culture School Camp." It was an experience with serious, no-nonsense, true racial integration, where everybody was valued based on who they were and what they brought, not based on other nonsense. Probably in the '60s, when I was going through all the temptations with black nationalism, I had been so anchored in believing that it was possible for folks to live with each other—and work with each other across racial lines and with respect—that I didn't get dragged into racial separatism.

How did you end up coming to MIT?

A fluke. I was director of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center. I was there from 1965 to '71, and I was director—executive director—from '67 to '71.

Around 1970, I decided I was near burnout. After tough years of building and running an agency, a big multi-service center in the black community during riots and civil rights struggles, I had come to the point that it was time for me to get renewal. I needed to pull back and spend some time thinking about all I had been through during the '60s, what I had learned, and what those lessons meant for my future contribution to the city.

So I decided I was going to resign and I was going to try to find some way to get a year to think, reflect, and renew myself. I had started down the track of trying to get some foundations to fund me for a year. I was going to do some writing and so forth. Nothing was coming up and, all of a sudden, I got a call from Mel King saying, "Hey, I hear you're thinking about leaving the Multi-Service Center. What are you planning to do?" I said, "I'm planning to take a year to think, write, reflect." He says, "Well, it looks like we may establish this program called the Community Fellows Program at MIT. It sounds like it would provide you the opportunity you're talking about that you want. This is what the stipend looks like. Would you be interested?"

That led to me ultimately applying and being selected as a Community Fellow in 1971-'72, the first year of the program. I was a Fellow with the first group. During that year, my project turned into running for Congress in the Ninth Congressional District. That was not the original plan. In fact, they probably should not have allowed me to do it. But anyway, they did allow me to do it. I ran for Congress and got defeated in the primary. The day after the primary defeat, I got a call from Lloyd Rodwin, who was the head of the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. He basically said, "Look, I'm really sorry what happened here about you losing. You ran a terrific campaign. Would you consider teaching in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning?" I said, "I really don't know. I don't know what I want to do." He said, "Well, let's sit and talk about it."

We worked out an arrangement. I was appointed as an associate professor, but I agreed I would only do it for one year. Well, anyway, it ended up going for five years. The last year I was at MIT, I directed the Community Fellows Program, taking it over and totally reorganizing it, putting it in a different direction, giving it what I thought was more credibility.

I was clear by the time I had started running the Community Fellows Program that I wanted to run something again, that I wanted to have some control over some resources in terms of my mission in the city and my mission around youth issues and so forth. So out of the blue came the deanship of the Boston University School of Social Work, where I had gone to school. I had gotten some calls from some people saying, "The dean is retiring, they're going to be looking for a new dean, would you have any interest?" I said, "No, I would not have any interest." Some of my colleagues at MIT heard about it and a couple of them said, "Hey, Hubie, you ought to think about this. Can't we take you to lunch and talk?" "Yeah, fine. I'll talk with you." Frank Jones was one of them. They said, "Look, as long as you're clear about what you want to get done in academia, the academic base can be useful as a resource space to get certain things done in the city and the kinds of things you're interested in getting done. Just look at us here at MIT. Many of your colleagues here do lots of work in the community, in the world, but they don't ever leave this base. They may leave here for two years to go to Washington and England and so forth, and for a number of reasons they don't leave academia permanently. So you ought to think about it. You ought to rethink this opportunity." I said to them, "Well, yeah. Yeah, okay."

But one of the things I was very clear about was that if I was going to go to BU, if selected to do so, I would have to disconnect myself for two years from all of the civic responsibilities I had in order to demonstrate to President John Silber and others that I knew how to be a dean, that I knew how to run a school of social work, and that I could rebuild one. But that would take a concentrated effort, and was I prepared to pull back from the leadership of many civic organizations that I was engaged in at that time? That was the price to do it, although I understood that once I rebuilt the school, I would be very useful to these organizations.

Anyway, the story is that I left MIT. Part of that was due to good counsel from some of the black faculty colleagues saying, "You ought to think about this. Just don't dismiss it. Go over and be interviewed." So when I go over to be interviewed, I've got to get into thinking about it. I've got to get thinking about what I would do. So that's how that happened. It was a great decision.

You stayed at MIT about six years?

I came in '71 as a Community Fellow and I left in August of '77.

When you look back on that experience, when you reflect on it, identify what you would consider of special significance in your experience there.

MIT was important to me and my development in a number of ways. First of all, this was my first fling working in academia in a professorial kind of way full-time. I had never thought of myself as being an academic or a professor. I always saw myself as someone who operated from a community base, an organizational base. I had never seen academia as a career path. If I had seen it as a career path, I would have gotten a doctorate. I never got a doctorate. There was a point around age thirty-five or thirty-six when I had to make the choice about whether I was going to the Heller School at Brandeis and get a Ph.D. in social welfare. I came close. But I always thought of academia as something that would keep me from being fully engaged. That was my view. It was erroneous, but that was my view.

MIT helped me to see that I could be of value in the academy. I always did teaching. I always did part-time teaching. I always wanted to, because I always felt it was important to be able to articulate what you thought you knew. My view is that if you can't articulate it, then maybe you don't know it. So I always taught. I taught at Simmons, I taught at Harvard, I taught at Boston University School of Social Work. That was always an important part of my intellectual development. I loved teaching, but I never thought of myself as a full-time academic or a full-time scholar. I think I got some validation from my colleagues in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning—"Yeah, you can do it in academia, you're valuable here, you're making a contribution here." They tried very hard to keep me from going to BU. Rodwin was the head of the department at the time, although in the end I was dealing with Langley Keyes.

The other thing that was a mind blower for me was, here I had been in the Boston community for all these years, MIT in my environment, and I had no idea of the resource base at MIT until I got there—the extraordinary technical and scientific resource base in the institution, the enormous power of the institution. I would say my first two

years at MIT were a study in looking at an institution with power—with enormous power, international power—and how it used it or did not use it. It was the first real awareness for me that technology was going to rule society in the years ahead. I was totally deficient in knowing about technology and science and their implications in the society. I would say I was naive. I think I woke up. I began to understand the role. I had no idea, many people didn't have any idea. Just listening to Jay Forrester, and that's nothing now compared to the rapid changes taking place. So in that sense MIT got me into thinking cutting edge, got me to think about boundaries, and that probably there are no boundaries. I think that was important.

There were a couple of interesting models there too. I never had any real relationship with him, but I had very high regard for Jerome Wiesner. My wife had had a lot of dealings with his wife, Laya, through the Metco program. My wife had a tremendous regard for her. I used to hear about Laya Wiesner all the time from my wife, because they were working together on Metco. I knew Jerry Wiesner from a distance and always had regard for him, but when I got to MIT I got some closer looks at him. Clearly, he was very instrumental in the Community Fellows Program happening. Otherwise, it wouldn't have happened. That was absolutely clear and he helped sustain it.

Another important part of my MIT experience was two young guys there who were in management—the fact that they were there, John Turner and Clarence Williams, operating at those levels. Even though I understood what the institution was and was not, it was an important piece for those of us who were operating at other levels in the department. At the time I was in the department, there were a lot of students of color because of the HUD program. At one point, we had more students of color than Caucasians in the program. There was some rich diversity. That was a good part.

Then, of course, the Community Fellows Program was important to my development because it gave me some time and space to think, reflect and think about the academy in relationship to this community, its resource base, how it could be used, and all the rest. But I would say the most important thing that happened to me in the Community Fellows Program was that there were

some fellows from Boston in the program—Byron Rushing, Chuck Turner, and so forth, people I had worked with on civic projects, but whom I really found out I didn't know. It took me being in the Community Fellows Program to find out that Chuck Turner had a fine, fine mind. This is a very, very gifted man with a spiritual side I did not know about. It was another kind of wake-up call, because Boston is a place where people really don't get to know each other. You can work with people for five, ten, twenty years and they're never in your home. It's weird. But I really got to know some of these Boston colleagues.

Another thing that happened to me at MIT is that black undergraduates somehow found me. They had heard, "Hey, there's a social work guy up in Urban Studies. Go up there and talk to him." So there was a period when I had three or four black undergraduates who would come to talk, just talk and tell me what was going on with them at MIT. I would just provide some support. I wasn't doing social work, I was just listening and providing support. But I learned a great deal about what they were experiencing as students.

The best way to describe it, as they described it, was that the first two years were a stripping-down process. With the tough rigors of the scientific and the technical learning they had to go through, even though they were very smart folks like everybody else there, they felt like they were just stripped. There were times when they wondered whether or not they were going to make it. Then I'd see them when they were about juniors and they'd say, "Well, yeah, it was tough, man, but I pulled it together. I'm reconstructed and I'm going back to Nashville. I'm going back to Nashville and let me tell you, there is nothing I can't do, nothing I can't do. I didn't think I was going to make it the first two years, I'll tell you that for sure. But I'll tell you right now, based upon where I am now and what I've been through and what I've learned and what I've seen and particularly about how an institution like this works, there's nothing I can't do."

I hear it constantly now.

I'm sure, I bet you have—"There's nothing I can't do. I've gotten through MIT and I've been through this whole gauntlet, this whole trip." So that was important for me to understand—and I don't want to say this in a negative way—how

brutal the educational challenges were early on for students, but for students of color particularly.

It's a tough place.

Tough place, tough place.

When you look back at it as a faculty member, your department was always in my opinion the model department, if you could call any of the twenty-three departments any kind of model. Your department always took situations like recruitment—the tactics they used or the strategic planning for recruiting of minority students I still say was one of the best I've seen in the country during the time you were there. Even though there were not a lot of you, you still had more black faculty members in the department than any department in the institution. I think Bill Davis was there when you were there.

Yes, sure.

There were about three or four of you, but we had so many departments that didn't have one. When you look back at that experience, were there any things you didn't like about your experience there?

I always had a problem with the campus as a physical environment. I found it to be not sterile, but just the way it's built—you know, Building 1, Building 9. Engineers, you know what I mean? Very little green space. So I never resonated with the physical environment of the campus. Even though I'm a city kid and went to a city university, I found that to be a problem.

I always thought that once you got beyond Jerry Wiesner, the Community Fellows Program was never regarded as a serious program. I remember having to deal with Walter Rosenblith, the provost. I had to deal with him when I was head of the program. Basically, he wanted someone to really convince him that the Community Fellows Program had serious value. Some things had gone on in the running of the program that weren't good. It was my job to turn it around and give it some credibility and so forth. But beyond that, there was always that concern on my part that the Community Fellows Program was not seen as really an important part of the academic mission of the Institute and that maybe this was second-rate stuff, that it wasn't scholarship in the traditional sense, that it wasn't academia in the traditional sense. So I think that was always tough.

Then, after Wiesner was somewhere else, there was a question as to whether the institution was going to really have a commitment to raising

the money it needed to prosper. And it never did, in my judgment. Aside from Frank Jones, you had no senior blacks in the department, and after a while, he had no standing. So basically, there was no powerful black faculty voice in the arenas where tenured professors were making decisions, where they ran the department. By and large I agreed with what they were doing, but we had no real serious access in those decision-making processes.

I'm just barely associated with the department now. I have an adjunct professorship there and I teach a course. That's really how I got connected with it, so I haven't gotten a chance to really see everything. I've heard all the names, Langley Keyes and all these people. I'm occasionally now sitting in on the first layer of meetings. They have these senior meetings that none of us are able to go to, and I know that's where the decisions are made. But I'm going to make my voice known. I haven't gotten to know these people, but when I sit there in the few meetings I've gone to, I never hear anything said about black people. I don't hear anything being said about black people, nor do I see them. It's hard for me to relate to urban studies in that department now. Maybe it's just that I'm missing something, but I do find it difficult in that sense. It must have changed considerably since all of you were there in the early '70s. It's not the same.

Well, it shifted with the society. Society has shifted its attention from us in lots of ways—in policy terms, resource terms, political terms, and all the rest. Of course, the fiasco around the handling of the James Jennings situation is an example of the fact that we're not back where we were in '71 when I came in. I don't think you would have had this kind of situation back then. It was an example of elitism that ill-serves MIT. It was institutional racism in the way in which the Jennings appointment was handled, the decision that he was not worthy of tenure. So that was distressing.

Very distressing. These were people who, I suspect, in the '70s had been very much a part of the effort to do a lot of things in our regard.

Not to call names, but Rodwin had gotten me to be there. I wouldn't have been there if Lloyd Rodwin hadn't picked up the phone and said, "I want you here." I would never have been in academia, which meant I never would have been a dean at the Boston University School of Social Work. The only thing that got me any currency with John Silber was that I had been at MIT, that

I had been a professor at MIT. I didn't have a doctorate. Very few deans in the country don't have doctorates. So MIT was the ticket.

But then when it came to the James Jennings stuff, Lloyd Rodwin was telling me why he wasn't up to it. Rodwin said to me, "I want you to come back." I said, "James Jennings is more qualified than I am to be a professor over there. I don't have his scholarship standing. I don't have a whole set of things. I know what I have, I know my competence, but you're saying you want me back? I don't even have what he has. What are you talking about?" So this is the irony.

I haven't talked to anyone in the Boston area who has had as broad leadership roles as you have. I haven't talked to anybody like you in the community, politics, and university settings. Obviously, you have learned something that a lot of young blacks need to take heed to, in my opinion. What advice would you give to the young black men and women coming up today? I know about your family. You not only have done it in the community, but you and your wife have done it with your family. You have some skills that a lot of folks do not have.

It's probably the answer I tell most young people, including my kids. First of all, pursue the work that you have passion about. That's number one. Make the decision about what you want to do based upon the thing that you feel very passionately about and that you know you can make a contribution to, whether anybody else knows it or not. My father wanted me to be a doctor. I had no passion for being a doctor. It was not on my dance card at all. He was totally upset when he heard I was going to be a social worker. "What the hell is this?" He never said it to me. I heard him telling my mother, "What is this guy going to do? Make three thousand dollars for the rest of his life? Come on now, what's going on here?" But I had to make a decision, whether my parents or anybody liked it or not, that this was what I felt good about, where I felt I could make a contribution doing what I felt passionately about.

So that's number one. Don't do anything you don't feel passionately about, because ultimately you're going to go into burnout and be dissatisfied and have all kinds of reasons as to why you can't do your job. Don't be guided by monetary reward. You've got to live and all the rest, but monetary reward can't drive it.

Number two, don't stay in a job when the growth potential is over. When you know you have contributed all you can contribute and you can learn and grow no more, then it's time for you to move to other places. If you are not continually growing and developing and being challenged, then you are going to be in a rut. Not only are you going to be in a bad place, but the organization—the work you're doing that you care about—is not going to prosper.

I've always said that, and I've been kind of crazy about it at times. My mother and wife at times thought I was a nut because I quit jobs. I quit jobs and I didn't have another one to go to. I quit a job because I wanted to be the director of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center. I wanted to get out of Newton and be doing something in the middle of the black community in the middle of the civil rights revolution. That's where I needed to be. A new agency was being started. But I didn't have the job, and there were some people who were trying to keep me from getting the job who were on the board. But I said, "I'm not going to be in Newton, whether I get this job or not—I'm quitting." I had five kids. My mother thought I had flipped out. My wife—I don't know what she thought.

And the same was true about my decision to leave BU after sixteen years. I rebuilt the school. I had done everything I could. I could have stayed there for life and coasted, but I went to Roxbury Community College to keep it from going under. While I was there, I had to use every skill, every resource, every chit I ever had in life to keep that institution from going under. And I realized I was marking time at BU. I was at a point where I could do the deanship with one arm behind my back, and I was no longer growing there. So I decided it was time to turn it over to somebody else.

I had no idea what I wanted to do. In fact, I went into a panic and I had to go into therapy. I knew I wanted to retire from BU, but I didn't want to retire totally. Although people kept saying, "Oh, you'll get a job," I said, "Oh really? Where is it?" But I knew my decision to retire from BU was right, because I needed to do something else and they probably needed new leadership now. I didn't want to stay at RCC because that was a ten-year commitment. If I was younger, I would have stayed at RCC. My wife didn't want me to do it either, because that was really a ten-year commitment to

build it. It could have been rebuilt. It could have been sterling. As things happened, somebody called me up and said, "Hey, why don't you come over here to the University of Massachusetts, Boston as a fellow at the McCormack Institute? I hear you're thinking about leaving BU. Why don't you come over here and do what you want?" That's how I got to U Mass Boston.

But my advice has been basically about taking the risk of leaving positions when you're really at the end of a growth/learning cycle. The other thing I would say to young people, which I know I would never hear myself when I was twenty or thirty, is "don't burn bridges." When I was twenty and thirty, I burned bridges—"You mess with me and do something dishonorable, man, you are off my chart for life." And if I could get you, if I had a way to get you ultimately, I would wait to find out how I could get you and pay back. A lot of these people I had to come back and work with. My mission to get certain things done required me to work with them. So I spend a lot of time telling my kids, "Don't burn that bridge. If you've got to leave, leave. That's fine. But don't go out killing everybody in the process, because ten years from now you may be working with this guy. The person may be your boss. You don't know. You have no idea where life's going to take you." Nobody could tell me that in my twenties and thirties.

I guess the only thing I would say now—it has taken me a long time to get there—is that I don't do anything now that doesn't reinforce the basic agenda I'm pursuing. So I don't take a speech, I don't care how much money is involved, and I don't take a consultation job, no matter how much money is involved—or whatever—unless it's work that reinforces the things I'm trying to now get done at the end of my professional and civil life. There are certain things I want to get done now which I'm very focused on. I don't do anything unless it reinforces that agenda.

Right now I have about two or three things I'm trying to get done. I'm trying to get Boston's leadership to have a commitment to civic learning, learning from other cities and leaders from other cities about best practices, and so on, so that we can bring that knowledge back here and help the city improve. The mayor and I disagree on many things, but I'm in alliance with him and the Chamber of Commerce, which I've never had big ties to either, although the person who now heads

it is somebody I've known a long time and I have a lot of respect for. I now have an alliance with the Chamber and the mayor relating to the city-to-city program. In 1997 we took forty-five Boston leaders—corporate, non-profit, government leaders—to Atlanta to learn from Atlanta's leaders about how they make things happen, shape opportunities, solve problems. Boston had never taken its leaders to other cities for learning. We are very parochial here. It was a very successful trip. We learned important things. Some of those lessons are now beginning to work in the city.

So what I'm trying to get abroad now is that you can't have a civic leadership that isn't committed to learning from other places and getting that to work in the city. Hopefully, one of my contributions over the next two or three years will be to get deeply into the muscle of the city, a commitment to learning beyond its borders. One of the reasons we're going to Seattle is that our last session in Seattle before we leave is with the people who made the Seattle thing happen. We're basically saying to them, "Okay, you've done this for sixteen years, domestically and internationally. Now you tell us how you have taken the best practices that you've learned and made them operate in your city." Of course, this is our second time. We're going to be committed to this indefinitely, but we want to do it in a way in which we are not just networking with each other and having a good junket with each other, but we're doing something positive. So right now, I make decisions about what I do based upon this thing I'm trying to get to happen in Boston in a more major way, in a more solid way.

So if it doesn't fit into that, you're not going to get involved.

Yes, if it doesn't help to support that work. I have this civic forum that I started as part of my work here. I'm trying to see if I can develop a powerful vehicle for public discourse around the challenges facing the city now and in the years to come. We're getting there.

That's one of the things I've come late to, which is hopefully a little wisdom. But there was a time when I went around responding on everything. When you respond to everything, you are stretched too thin. I also would tell a young person, particularly around volunteer work, that when you're in a volunteer role—whatever it is, if it's a

meeting or whatever—if you can't figure out that your presence is making a difference there, then you shouldn't waste your time. You shouldn't be there. I don't go to meetings where I don't think my being there will make a difference to the thinking processes and the potential outcomes. I spend a lot of my time just being in meetings, but I'm very judicious now.

Then finally, the only other thing I would say—and this is why I like social work, being a social worker—is take your skills and your talents into any arena where they can make a difference. There should be no boundaries, so take your skills into any arena. I've done television for eighteen years. This is probably the most important piece of work I do during the week, for a number of reasons. One is because a black person in Boston has never had sustained access to television as a commentator, to have a voice, a particular kind of voice. A social worker has never had this kind of opportunity to have a voice on a whole set of local, national, and international issues. I had to learn how to do it. I almost got wiped away year one by my colleagues, who were very skilled. I had to learn how to do it quickly.

There is a skill involved in that, isn't there?

Oh yes. I didn't know it when I started it. Avi Nelson was one guy. They would take me to the cleaners. I'd come out talking to myself—"What the hell? I made a fool of myself. These guys are so articulate." But they knew all the techniques. They knew about how to watch for when a segment was ending. Then they would drop a bomb right at the end of a segment, so that a person couldn't respond to it. They'd be looking for the cues and they'd be seeing the two minutes to go, one minute to go. They'd wait, then they'd throw a thing at me, and I'd go to respond. "*Commercial!*" Then you come back and it's the next subject, and you look like a dope. They said something wild about some black people or something like that, or how you social workers destroyed the world, whatever it is, and you can't respond.

How do you deal with the information, though? You appear to really have a control or knowledge of all this vast amount of information in responding to these different questions. How do you get a handle on that?

Well, first of all, by now I'm a political junkie, so I'm reading widely on politics and news events.

But the producer does a very good job of putting together a packet every week. We get called on Thursday and are told the three topics. I have to take it seriously, because people believe they're getting their news this way, which is awful. They say, "Oh, this is how I find out about what's going on here. This is how I get my information." I say, "Oh man, you're getting your information by what we're telling you." So that's serious.

The other thing that always blows me away is that people will pick up everything. You may have a little tag line or throw-away line that really wasn't central to what you were saying. You've got to be careful you don't do that either. People will stop me on the street and say, "Well, wait a minute, you said such-and-such. What do you mean by that?" I say, "Wait a minute, that wasn't even central to the thing—what are you talking about?" "No, no, no. You said such-and-such. What did you mean by that? I don't think I agree with that. What do you mean by that?" It's amazing what people pick up. So you've got to be really careful you don't get into ad hominem statements and being cute, because people listen to that.

The other thing I find most distressing is that this is such an image-driven society, and television is a grand example of that, that people really many times aren't listening to the content, the auditory content. They're looking at the style and so forth. So sometimes somebody will say, "Oh man, I saw you last week, you were whaling, man, you really did it to them." I said, "What were we talking about?" They don't know. "What was the subject? What were we talking about?" "Oh, I don't know, but you were giving it to them, man. You were just..."

It's just not enough to convey information. You've also got to convey it in ways in which people can relate to it. You learn all that stuff. As a black person, you learn a lot about communicating. You can't be yelling and ranting every week, consistently jacking people up and perceived to be screaming. Even when you're not screaming, white folks believe when they hear you that a black person who raises his voice is screaming. So you've got to be real careful that you're not being perceived to be screaming every week, because then you're a black radical nut and nobody is going to have access to what you're saying. I have to keep that in my head, "What was last week like? How

much jacking up did I do last week? How much jacking up is possible this week?"

So actually in many cases you have to consider race as very important.

In Boston? Are you kidding me?