CLARENCE G. WILLIAMS

b. 1938, BA 1961 (humanities) North Carolina Central University, MA 1967 (counseling psychology) Hampton Institute, PhD 1972 (higher education administration and counseling psychology) University of Connecticut; joined the MIT administration in 1972 as assistant dean of the Graduate School; special assistant to the president, 1974– ; acting director, Office of Minority Education, 1980–1982; assistant equal opportunity officer, 1984–1994; Institute ombudsperson, 1993– ; co-coordinator, Issues Facing Black Administrators at Predominantly White Colleges and Universities, national conferences convened at MIT in 1982 and 1984.

I was born in 1938, in Goldsboro, North Carolina, into the family of Leroy Williams, Sr., and my mother, Daisy Williams. I was born into a family of ten kids. I'm the third from the youngest; I have two sisters and seven brothers. We grew up in a segregated community. I can recall my first day, in 1944, going to an elementary school that consisted of all black children, and all of my teachers were black. My elementary school principal, Mr. Christian, was very inspirational. I always looked up to him because he was a very well-dressed man and very intelligent, as far as I could see. Even now I think he was a very outstanding person. My first-grade teacher was a very young, beautiful woman by the name of Mrs. Alexander. I was, I think, somewhat her pet, because I always did very well in school. Throughout my elementary school, I always had women teachers and they always thought a lot of me.

Was this in the city of Goldsboro or was this outside?
It was in the city. That's a good question, because it could have been in Wayne County. A lot of people live out in the country and they just say Goldsboro, but this actually was in the city of Goldsboro.

Your brothers and sisters had already gone through the same school system.
Yes. In fact, all of us went through the school system from first grade through high school—Dillard High School. We grew up in groups, almost like two families or three families. We're all two years apart, so my oldest brother who was in high school at the time and then college, I never really knew until our later years.

Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Kenneth R. Manning with Clarence G. Williams in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 22 December 1998.

He was like an uncle, almost.
Exactly.

You were down with the youngest group.
Exactly.

By the time you came up, the oldest ones were out of the house.
They were out of the house. All of my older brothers went into the armed services. Interestingly enough, they mostly went to the Navy. But I always knew of them and met and talked to them quite frequently, because they would come home. They were very excellent role models. I watched everything they did.

And your sisters too?
Oh, yes. My younger sister, Estelle, perhaps was—other than my mother—the most influential person on my life, and still is. She's a registered nurse.

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She went to an all-black nursing school in Greensboro. She always looked out for me, and actually was responsible for me having my first car in high school. So she was very important. My oldest sister attended Hampton University. By the way, all of my brothers and sisters went to college, except two. They either went to North Carolina A&T University, Hampton Institute, or North Carolina Central.

That's rather unusual, for so many in a family to go to college. It's just unusual in any circumstances, but for there to be ten children and eight of them go to college, that's rather unusual. What do you think brought that about?

Contrary to most people's belief, I actually came from a very poor family. We didn't think we were poor, but we really did not have a lot. There were a lot of people in our community who did not have a lot, but it was an excellent community in the sense that school teachers, as well as people who worked in service job categories, all lived in the same neighborhood. When I look back on it, there were just some wonderful role models. The teachers would come and visit my parents to give report cards or to talk about how we were doing in school. They would come sit on the porch and talk to my mother.

My mother and father both finished the eighth grade. My mother actually stayed in the church a lot and insisted that we go to church, the First Baptist Church. My father was a part of the custodial staff of the church at one point in his career, so we were very much tied in with the First Baptist Church.

I think a lot of the reason we were able to go to college had to do with the kind of community support that we had. I think a lot of it had to do with my parents, who had very good values and sacrificed for all of us. My father had to go away and live in New York because he couldn't get a job in Goldsboro. He was working at a furniture factory. He got into some difficulty with some white men and got laid off. He went to New York to live with his brother. But he would come home every holiday and send money home every week. He worked two jobs until he was about seventy years old.

He went to New York when you were, say, nine or ten years old?

I was about six or seven years old. I really did not remember it that well, but my brothers and sisters told me what happened as I got older, as to why he actually left town. When I got older, particularly in high school, we would go to New York and visit. Of my older brothers, two of them actually moved to New York as well when they finished college. They would come home for Christmas, and a lot of times they would take me back to New York to stay with them. My father was staying with my aunt and uncle, his brother. We spent a lot of time at their house and became very fond of them.

So we did visit periodically. He tried to get my mother to come to New York, but she would not go. I think she was very wise, because she did not feel she could raise that many of us in the environment of New York City. She just did not like it, so she decided to stay at home in Goldsboro. That's how he started commuting back and forth, because she would not go.

How did it ever resolve itself, this situation with the white men? Did he ever get so that he could go back to Goldsboro and feel comfortable there?

Yes, but he had to stay away for a while, to let it cool down. They were lynching blacks at that time.

When did he first return?

I remember him coming back for holidays. By the time I got to be maybe ten or eleven years old, I can remember him coming back for Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Is he alive now?

No, he died in June 1998. He was staying with my sister in Hamden, Connecticut. He was a very wise and capable man. As I said, he worked until he was about seventy years old in the New York area and was basically very independent until a few years ago.

My mother passed in 1968. She was living with my sister in Hamden—the nurse I was telling you about. She never liked New England that much, but she would stay periodically with my sister, whom she liked a great deal. In her latter years, she stayed with my sister, although she continued to maintain our home in Goldsboro. She actually, believe it or not, died in Raleigh, North Carolina, because she wanted to go home. It was during the Christmas holidays, in fact, and she wanted to go home. She went on the bus. She was very independent. She wasn't feeling all that well, but she

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still wanted to go home. We were informed by the Raleigh bus station personnel that she "fell out." They took her to the hospital and she passed in December.

Who in the family is in Goldsboro now?
Actually, the only person who lives in Goldsboro now is my oldest sister. I have two brothers in Detroit, Michigan. There were three, but one died about four years ago. I have a brother in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; a sister in Hamden; a brother in White Plains, New York; a brother in Bridgeport, Connecticut; and a brother in New Haven, Connecticut. There are nine of us now.

I think the thing I would say is that all of them have been very good at what they've done and what they're doing now. My oldest brother just retired a few years ago from the post office. He worked for the post office for the latter part of his career, and earlier he worked with my father at the Bridgeport Brass Company. My next oldest brother was for a long time owner of several Burger Kings in Detroit. He was a businessman, and still is, but he just recently became ill. He has had to curtail a lot of the work, but for a long time he had three or four Burger Kings. My sister, as I mentioned before, is the next-oldest. She has lived in several places in the U.S. and Germany with her late husband, a U.S. Air Force member. She has had several jobs, and has always been very involved with community programs and the church. She went to Hampton, as I said. My oldest brother went to A&T. The one who has the Burger Kings went to Hampton, and the brother in White Plains went there also.

How did the tradition of going to Hampton start?
This was during the veterans' days, so I guess that had a lot to do with them being able to finance their education. We had a principal at Dillard High School, a very dominating principal, but in a way he was very influential on me going to Hampton. His name was Victor Brown, and everybody called him "Professor Victor Brown." He always wore three-piece suits with a watch chain hanging from the pocket. He was very organized, but very dominating. He knew exactly what he wanted.

Mr. Christian was a good dresser too, right?
That's absolutely right. I must say that the men who taught me, or who were in charge of the schools, had a tremendous influence not only on my behavior and things I learned, but also on how I dress even today.

Here you are, this smart little guy in the first grade. When did they start recognizing your academic talent?
I guess probably around seventh or eighth grade. During that time, the classes were like 7A, 7B, 7D. I did not recognize it at that time, but those designations meant something. If you were in class A, it meant you probably were doing better than those who were in class B. I think by the time I was in the seventh grade—seventh or eighth grade—I happened to always be in the top grades, either A or B. They would have officers of those classes. You're talking about perhaps thirty or thirty-five kids in each of those classes, and I was selected as the president quite frequently. I had to learn, for example, how to carry on a class meeting.

Parliamentary rules and all that?
Exactly. The students actually would sometimes vote, but I believe a lot of it had to do with the teachers.

At the same time, you were probably doing similar sorts of things in church?
Very much so. I was very active. I was very much involved in sports. I was actually the captain of my basketball team. I was the captain of the basketball team at North Carolina Central University, too. I've always played basketball. I played football when I was in high school, but I did not play in college. Those guys were too big. There were really big guys at North Carolina Central. I played a little baseball, but I didn't actually get very much involved in that. I was in the band. I played trumpet and French horn. I played in college as well. I was very active on campus in high school, and I did very well academically.

Our principal had an agreement for high school students to work during the summer with tobacco companies in Connecticut, like the Cigar Consolidated Tobacco Company. Teachers would select a group of male students in grades 10–12. I'm talking about hard work, basically working in the tobacco fields, the ones you pass traveling on Highway 84. Transportation, by bus, and living accommodations were arranged by our principal and male teachers. They were our chaperones.

Goldsboro is a big tobacco place itself.
Absolutely.

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People from South Carolina would go to the tobacco farms around Goldsboro, and they would have dormitory situations. So you were leaving one situation and going to another. I presume you could make much more money in Connecticut than you could in Goldsboro.
I think we did well. When you realize we were high school students, we did very well. We would stay the whole summer, and you're talking about really hard work. We would get there somewhere in early June and stay until late August.

How was the tobacco harvested? They didn't have tobacco barns like they do in the South, did they?
No, they didn't. It was done totally differently.

Did you go out into the fields and crop it off?
Oh, yes. Then we would put it in baskets. You had to crawl and you had these baskets. They had these huge places, I don't know what to call them now, where they would cure the cigar tobacco. See, they would do it differently than the cigarette tobacco. This was all for cigars.

Was it smoked or something, when they would cure it?
That's right, exactly.

What would you do with all that money? You would go and work all summer and save all that money up.
Well, part of it I would give to my mother, who needed the help in terms of food. I always worked after school, too. I always worked downtown because my mother needed the support. My father sent her money, but it was not enough. I had to shine shoes. I shined shoes on Sundays until church time. Then my mother wouldn't let me shine shoes, because I had to go to church. I would shine shoes and give her half of that. I worked on Saturdays.

Did your younger brothers help in the same way you did?
Basically, yes. I think that particularly my younger brother, Ralph, worked very hard. We had several jobs that were passed on to the next one. We also worked for a white family who had a mentally retarded son. The father was a vice president at our local bank and his wife took care of the son. She hired us to clean the house, vacuum, wax the floors, and cut the grass. My older brothers had that job and passed it on to me, then I passed it on to my younger brother.

That family was a very, very important family to us. We always had a high regard for them. Contrary to what most people believed, they really treated us well for that time. At noon, the father would come home for lunch. I'd be cutting grass while they had their lunch. When they finished, the mother would fix my plate and I'd sit at the same table, but I never sat with them. However, when we had financial difficulties, we could always go to the bank and he would approve our loans.

That was the white family I really got to know closest over a long period of time. The Alexanders were very important, I think, to our family.

I thought Alexander was also your teacher.
Yes, but that one was black. Actually, I hadn't thought about it, but that's correct. My teacher's name was also Alexander.

I suppose your mother just had too many things to deal with and she couldn't work.
My mother never worked, except seasonally. She would take us out of school sometimes—again, because we were poor—to pick cotton. We'd be out of school.

How much could you pick?
I never picked much more than a hundred pounds.

You'd get two dollars a hundred.
I couldn't pick very much. My mother would pick way more than me. She could pick two hundred pounds, but I never picked very much. As I said, I've always had to work, ever since I can remember. I was absent from school many days.

Did that pose a problem for you in catching up, when you did get to go back to school regularly?
Not a whole lot, because a lot of kids were doing that. Their families had to do that, too. I think, when I look back on it, that the places where I had some difficulties catching up were mostly in the areas of math and science. I think I would have been able to do much better in some of those areas otherwise. They required so much. I had the hardest time trying to catch up on those things, because you couldn't fake those at all—there was a slight problem there, no question. I think the point I want to make, though, is that I have always had to work.

Well, you had responsibilities. It was a natural thing and it builds character.

Now, when did you start with this basketball stuff? You used to go out in the backyard, put up these rims, and you thought you could play basketball. That started about the eighth grade?

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I was always playing around with the kids in my neighborhood. We all would come and we did have these basketball hoops in the backyard, made out of tire rims. We'd stay out there shooting all day long. We always played like that, way before the eighth grade, and I actually started playing with older guys by the time I was in the eighth grade. That helped me a lot. My brothers did not play a lot of basketball. I think I was probably the only one who in that time frame became fairly good at basketball. Our high-school team actually represented the east in North Carolina in my senior year. Two teams from the east and two teams from the west would compete in a state tournament. There was a young man who became a pro-basketball player, Walt Bellamy. He was from New Bern, North Carolina. Walt Bellamy beat us. He was about seven feet tall.

But anyway, we went to the state championship and we played a team out of Charlotte. Basically, they beat us very badly. In fact, the state championship was held on the North Carolina Central University campus. I had two or three of my teeth knocked out, playing basketball in that tournament with this team, West Charlotte High School. They beat us and eventually won the state championship.

I hope so, after knocking your teeth out! It wouldn't have been for any good if they had knocked your teeth out and then lost. That's terrible. Anyway, then you got to know Central. Your brothers, or one of your brothers, had gone there.

My older brother, Curly—they called him C.O. in his later life, he's the one who passed away—had gone to North Carolina Central University. He and I looked a lot alike. You probably couldn't tell the two of us apart, if you saw us from a distance. He actually was very influential in my going to North Carolina Central. He used to come back home and talk about it, and I used to visit him on campus. I really liked the campus. It was a beautiful campus, in comparison to anything I had seen in those times. I did not go there based on playing basketball. I just liked the campus and I followed him, essentially.

In high school, here you are in the tenth grade and you start taking your courses for college. This was a segregated high school. By this time, I suppose some people had started dropping back and the people who were going to go on were going on. How would you assess your high school experience, with your teachers and your curriculum?

When I look back on my education, I would have to say that the high school experience for me was the best experience I've had as far as education is concerned. I was in a class of about 140 students. I probably finished in the top ten of that class, but more importantly, I think more than thirty or thirty-five percent of my classmates went on to college. Most of them went to schools in the state—North Carolina A&T, North Carolina Central, St. Augustine's, or Johnson C. Smith University, and several other historically black schools.

I think the teachers and the principal were extremely positive people, and wonderful role models and mentors. Many of them are still in Goldsboro. Two of them, especially, have been extremely positive. In fact, Mr. John Wooten has written a recommendation for me for almost all my college applications, fellowships, and awards. He was my biology teacher. He eventually became principal of the high school, and then assistant superintendent when the school system integrated. He still attends our church. One of the things about our church is that a large number of the teachers at that high school went to the First Baptist Church. Victor Brown was an associate or an affiliate pastor of the church during my high school days.

Anyway, they have always been extremely supportive. Mr. Neil Stitt played a major role in developing the Dillard Alumni Association. Even though the schools are now integrated, there is a national Dillard Alumni Association. Every Memorial Day, at least two to three thousand Dillard High School graduates attend the events in Goldsboro. There are chapters in New York, Philadelphia, and several other cities. The Association bought one of the elementary schools in town, and that is now the Alumni Center. It's very well established. I received, in fact, an Alumni Award last year. Mr. Stitt was the Dillard High School choir director, along with teaching music. He untiringly devotes many hours to the success and the survival of the organization. It's fantastic.

I was in the class of '57. But that high school experience, I think it had to do with black teachers who really just cared about students. When I go to church, they're there and they know who I am. It's a wonderful experience. I feel sorry for some

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people who have not had that kind of experience—coming out of a segregated background, but still having the experience of these wonderful black folks who really cared about you. You knew they cared about you.

So it was in this environment that you decided you were going to go to Central.

Right. I think that, although my brother had gone, several of my teachers had graduated from Central, and they encouraged me to go. In fact, my guidance counselor, Mrs. Hardy, was from North Carolina Central. She got her degree from North Carolina Central and encouraged me to go there. I must say that North Carolina Central was considered by some to be the "Chapel Hill" for black students in North Carolina.

How big was Goldsboro? Was it a county seat?

Yes. It was about forty or forty-five thousand people, I would say, at the time. It may be a little higher now. But what made that number very high was that the Air Force base located there.

How did that affect the atmosphere in town? Was it seen as a good thing or a bad thing?

At that time, it was seen as a very good thing. First of all, it brought money and prestige to the city. You had additional families coming in, so at that time, it was a very positive kind of experience. It added to the community.

So here you are going off to college. You don't have any money, but that didn't stop you.

Again, I have to go back to my father, who as I said worked two jobs, and as long as I can remember he always had two children in college at the same time. He had a shift, and he maintained that shift at Bridgeport Brass until he retired at sixty-five. He had a shift from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. Then he would leave there and work for some rich white families until about 3 p.m. Then he would go home and, I guess, do what he had to do with that short length of time. He had to sleep and eat, and then he had to be back to work at 11 p.m. That means he probably couldn't get any more than three or four hours of sleep a day. But he stayed on that schedule for as long as I can remember, in order to send money home to the family and then trying to pay tuition and send money to us in college—there were always at least two of us. We had to find ways to supplement that. He could only do so much, but he was willing to sacrifice.

I always had to work in college. I would work hard so that I could get a few dollars, kind of like a scholarship, playing basketball. My brother and I were in school for one year at the same time. We had gotten loans that we paid back after graduation. We mostly made it on loans and the small amount of money that my father and mother would send. My mother, even with the little money she would get, would send something. I'll never forget: We would get this letter from her and she would have two dollars in there.

We knew it was a real sacrifice. My parents had a sense of value for the education and they were willing to sacrifice. It was not easy, but it set some kind of values.

And it gave you inspiration to keep going. You knew someone had made that sacrifice.

Absolutely. It's kind of a legacy you pass on, I think. I always felt very strongly that if they could do that, then I had no choice but to do things myself.

You weren't going to mess up. You were going to go there and work hard.

Your first year, I presume you took general courses. When did you decide on your major?

There were two things that happened in my first year, probably the most important ones that helped me to go in the direction that I've gone. First, in my freshman year, I took biology. I wanted to become a medical doctor when I went to North Carolina Central. There was a required course in biology, kind of like 6.001 at MIT. I took that course and got a C. I said, "Well, I'll never be able to take all those biology courses that I can see ahead." I think if there was anything that was probably the wrong thing to do, when I think back, it was to take that C as a message to say I could not do that. I actually changed my major because of that, and went over to social sciences.

There were two other things that happened. One is that when I took a course over there, I took it under this lady, Dr. Helen G. Edmonds. I had never met any teacher like her. One of the things I'll never forget, in one of the first courses I took under her, is that she talked about the experiences she had had in going to Washington and going to these very important conventions. First of all, I had never been on a plane and had never known anybody who had gone to all these Republican conventions. She talked about flying and being on a

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plane, and how people wouldn't sit beside her. She said that was great because then she would have more space that she could do her work. She would just make a joke out of things and talk about these very wonderful things. I had just never met anybody like her. I said, "Man, this is where I want to be." So I changed my major to history, to work under her primarily. That was a very important thing to happen.

Then the second thing that happened was that I met my wife, Mildred, who was also a freshman. I met her my second semester. It was kind of funny, because my roommate at the time was sort of dating her. I did not know, but I later found out that she liked me.

Where is Mildred from?
She's from St. Pauls, North Carolina. I thought she was the prettiest thing I had ever seen in my life. We met and have been together ever since. Those are, I think, the initial things that stand out well. She was in the school of business; that's where she got her degree. We went together for all of the next three years and then got married in February the following year.

So you're going through college, you're majoring in history, and you've met this dynamic professor, Helen G. When did she become dean? Was that during your stay?
I don't think so. I'm pretty sure it was after I left. Basically, Dr. Edmonds was the most outstanding person in that entire building—social sciences. You had geography and all these other fields in that building. There were some outstanding people there, but Dr. Edmonds was in my opinion tops. First of all, the students simply adored her. She was the kind of person who would take you to her house.

She was outgoing.
Yes, outgoing. She was just a wonderful person and would do everything she could for you. But on the other hand, she would tell you where she thought you were weak and how you needed to try to develop yourself. She was just superb and an incredible mentor. Individuals like Julius Chambers held her in high esteem. They knew she was a genuine scholar. I think she never got the kind of credit she should have gotten. If she had been coming up in this day and time, she would have been president of a place like North Carolina Central.

So you go through Central and you star on that basketball team.
Let me say a little bit about that, because I don't want to mislead you. I was the captain of the team. Our team consisted of several outstanding ballplayers from the Durham area. My coach, Coach Brown, was a part of the Durham community in a way. Then we had some students who came from New York and other cities in the North who were on the team. One of the concerns the coach had had over the years was that it would be really unfortunate if the captain of the team flunked out of school. One of the reasons why he selected me captain was because I had the best average. I wasn't one of the star ballplayers, but I was a well-grounded student.

So you got a little action.
Oh, I got action—not a little action, I got *action!* I was not on the starting five. I don't think I should give any impression that I was the star player, because I was not, but I held my own.

Anyway, here you are and you're graduating. You've gone to college. After you graduated, did you take a job?
This was the summer of 1961. When I finished college, I did not have a job. I went to Washington, DC and stayed with Mildred's sister, Fannie Williams.

What was Mildred's last name?
Cogdell.

Her sister happened to marry a Williams too?
Yes. Her older sister lived in Washington. Over the four years that Mildred and I had been together, I had gotten to know that family very well. They knew that Mildred and I were very close.

Anyway, her sister let me stay there. I had the intention of trying to find a government job or something in the social science area, because that was my interest. As you know, it takes so long for these government jobs to come through. I had applied for teaching jobs as well, and, in the meantime, I had no work. What was very depressing was the fact that the first job I got after I finished college was washing dishes in a restaurant in Washington. Here I was with this college degree and I was washing dishes for a very ordinary group of people in 1961. I washed dishes basically for the summer.

I still had not been able to get a job by September, but then I got a call from a principal in

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Williamsburg, Virginia. They had a need for an additional teacher at the last minute, and asked if I was free to come. I was just delighted, because I had not gotten another job offer. So I left Washington and about mid-September, I think it was, I went to Williamsburg, Virginia, to start teaching on the high school level at Bruton Heights High School —again, in a segregated environment.

You had applied there?
Yes. I had applied to a number of places, and that's how they eventually called me. I also had applied for teaching jobs in the Washington, DC area, particularly in Virginia, because when I looked at the salary scale in Virginia, cities like Arlington and a couple of others were paying higher salaries for teachers at that time. I had never visited Colonial Williamsburg, and didn't recall its history.

So I went to Williamsburg and stayed four years. It was a very good experience. The principal was a very reserved black man from whom I learned a lot. This was still during the segregated era, so all of the teachers were black. The elementary and high schools were all in the same location, just separate buildings. I had to work outside the school setting, too. The teachers, particularly the men, had jobs after school working in Colonial Williamsburg at big banquets and big conferences. The men who were in charge of the food services were connected with the school system. We would wait tables at night.

You'd be the little slave they'd bring around.
Exactly. That was the only thing I really didn't like about it.

It is a historic enactment, and you're the history teacher, no less.

So you were there for four years. Mildred was there and you had married by this time.
Right. We had gotten married in February, so that means I had not been there any more than six months or so. We married in that first year. She got a job at Hampton, about thirty miles away. She would drive there, but she finally carpooled with another lady who worked there also. During those four years, she was working in the president's office as a secretary. Jerome H. Holland was president. After being in Williamsburg for about four years, I got an offer to work at Hampton.

One day, I guess in her conversation with President Holland, he was saying that he needed a dean. She told him she knew a person who she thought would be a very good young dean of men, and that I was that person. So she called and told me about the position. I met with Dr. Holland and he hired me immediately after my interview.

That's how I left Williamsburg to go to Hampton Institute as an assistant dean of men. During those days, they had a dean of men and a dean of women.

Did they pay as much as you were getting at the high school?
No, I made less money. I made less at Hampton, but it was one of the most important moves I made. It would do two things. It would bring Mildred and me together so that commuting wouldn't be a problem, and also, even though there was a reduction in salary, it was a step up in prestige. It turned out that I was in charge of a residence hall of 257 men. We had an apartment in the residence hall, kind of like the arrangement is here at MIT for people who stay in residence halls, and I also was given an opportunity to teach as an instructor in the division of education. Not having to pay rent made up for the difference in earnings.

How long did you hold that job?
I stayed in that job four years. In the process, I was able to get a master's degree. Hampton had a joint program with Cornell University, where you could get a master's by attending Cornell during the summers and taking evening courses in the graduate program at Hampton.

Was Mildred still in the president's office?
Mildred worked in the president's office the whole time. Clarence Jr. was born at Hampton. We stayed there for four years. It was really a very positive experience.

I think the thing I really valued was working with the dean of men, a man who had worked at Howard University, had finished Howard University, and whose life was dedicated to showing young black men valuable principles about life. His name was Tom Hawkins. Dean Tom Hawkins was a real mentor for me. He taught me some valuable things. He would come to our apartment in the evenings about six o'clock. His office was right next door in one of the small residence halls, but he would say he was coming over for tea at four o'clock. He kept saying he would be coming for tea. I didn't understand what he meant

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by it. I took him literally at first, but he wanted to come for a cocktail, a drink. Eventually, I caught on to what he really wanted to come for, but he was saying "tea" so that it would sound more formal and professional.

He was a very fine role model. I was young. You couldn't tell the difference between me and the students, frankly, because we had some students who were veterans who lived in my residence hall. We had to develop educational programs for them. We had programs at least once a week, where we would bring in speakers. We had very nice displays in the entrance of the residence hall, always something there that would inspire the guys. As deans, we counseled and met with them on a regular basis. We checked their rooms, and if necessary, we had to talk to them about tidiness and cleanliness. It was just a very valuable experience, and Dean Hawkins would tell me certain things you could only learn from a person who has had that experience and who really wanted to serve as a mentor.

How did it happen that you left there to go to Connecticut?

Well, during that whole process, I would always plan programs that Dean Hawkins wanted to share with the president, as a part of his staff. For example, one time the display window featured President Holland so that the students could learn more about him. It included a big picture of him, a biography, news clippings, and so forth. He deserved it, and he was an excellent role model for the students. First of all, he was an All-American football player at Cornell in the 1930s, he had been the president of Delaware State College, he had worked in one of the Fortune 500 companies, I think Sun Oil Company—he was a part of the "network." I thought he was very outstanding and I liked him a lot, just based on his profile.

Anyway, I did his profile and Dean Hawkins told him about it. He asked the president to come and see this, and after that, President Holland became a mentor of mine and took a very strong interest in me. I told him that I wanted to go to graduate school. I wanted to go to Columbia Teachers College, because they had the best program for counseling and I knew a number of black people who had gone there. They had an excellent program, at least from what I had gathered.

This was in 1967 that I told him I was applying. I did apply and got accepted. Around this time, the students were getting a little restless on the Hampton campus. This was close to the period of the civil rights movement. There were several students who wanted the institution to look more closely at civil rights issues, to demonstrate and protest in the city and other places. I think he knew I was very popular on campus among the men. They had had an evaluation of all the deans, and I turned out to be the best dean of all of them. He didn't want me to go that year. After I had gotten everything straight and I'm ready to go, he tells me if I would wait a year, he would see that I got into a school. He said he didn't think Columbia was the best school to go to. He said there were just too many blacks going to that school. He thought I should go to this school where he had a friend who was the president, and that was the University of Connecticut. So I waited that year, although I was very upset with him.

His friend was white?

That's right.

But he's black.

Yes. His friend, the president at UConn, was Homer Babbidge. I don't know how they became friends. I think they had been on some major boards together. That was my assessment, but they were really very good friends.

But Jerome Holland had come from Cornell.

He had come from Cornell. I don't know exactly how they connected, but he told me directly, "Look, you wait a year and I can guarantee you I'll get you into that university. I have a very good friend. I will call him and he will set up everything for you." And he did.

So that is why I attended the University of Connecticut. When I got ready to go, I called Dr. Edmonds and she told me I should apply for a fellowship, I think it was the Southern Education Fellowship in Atlanta. She was on the board and was instrumental in helping me to get a fellowship that helped pay for my education at UConn.

When did your sister move to New Haven?

She had been in New Haven since the '50s, so Connecticut wasn't that new for me. In fact, several summers I had stayed with my sister and worked in a restaurant in New Haven, washing dishes in the kitchen. Also, I had come up during the summer to crop tobacco when I was in high school. It wasn't totally new, but I had never been

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on the campus of the University of Connecticut, Storrs—it was just like going out into the woods.

So you and Mildred pack up little Clarence Jr. and come up. Did you have a house?
Dr. Babbidge had helped us get an apartment based on the recommendation of Dr. Holland, so everything was set up when we got there. We came up and I started going to school. Mildred was working in the psychology department there. Again, Dr. Babbidge had set that up. This was in '68.

Then you started working on your degree.
Yes, and working. I was working on my degree along with working in the counseling and testing center, which played a major role in terms of my field of study. Again, that's what Dr. Babbidge had set up for me. I couldn't have asked for a better situation.

You were doing field work in the counseling area?
Exactly. There were no blacks in the graduate program I was in, not one.

Did you see Dr. Babbidge periodically?
Yes. He would meet with me once or twice a semester. He also taught a course that everybody tried to get into, a graduate course of about ten students—sort of a research, project-like course. I was in his class.

They had not recruited any black faculty members at that point, but shortly after I got there, at least two black faculty members were recruited from historically black institutions for the School of Education. One was Dr. Floyd Bass from North Carolina Central, and the other was Dr. William Brazziel, who came from Norfolk State. Dr. Brazziel is still there teaching and Dr. Bass just retired. My advisor, when I first got there, was a white professor who I don't think had ever had contact with anybody black. After I was there for about a year, I found out he was leaving the university and had made arrangements for all of his other graduate students—new advisors, and the rest. But he had never mentioned anything to me, and basically just left me stranded. So I took additional courses.

Why did he do that, leave you stranded? He made arrangements for everybody else.
The only thing I can say is that he did it because he didn't care a thing about black folks. I guess that's what I would say. I found out that he was leaving because I went to his office unannounced. He told me he was leaving and I should maybe see what I could do about finding another advisor. But he made no effort to do anything.

I had nobody for another year, which meant that I wasted a whole year. The idea was that I was supposed to get my doctorate, and Dr. Holland wanted me to return to Hampton to be the vice president for student affairs. It was taking me so long, he even sent one of his administrators to find out what was going on. It turned out that one of the newly appointed black professors evidently saw the difficulty. There were also one or two other black students by then. He had a chance to look at my record and saw that I had taken twice as many courses as were necessary in order to graduate. So he sent a message to me asking me to come and see him. I went and he told me, "You're really just out here. You should not be taking any more courses. You should be working on your dissertation and you should be getting your degree. If you like, I'll work with you."

To this day, I have to thank Floyd Bass, my advisor, who actually took me in, helped me develop a topic, and worked with me to complete my dissertation. He's still in Storrs, Connecticut, but retired. In fact, when we had our national conference at MIT in the early '80s, I invited him to participate. He was there, as well as Dr. Edmonds.

What was your dissertation on?
It was an investigation of the affective dimensions of the black experience in higher education. Essentially, I developed a test, an instrument for white folks, to test their knowledge regarding the black experience and black traditions in higher education.

Have you ever given it around MIT?
No, I have not.

You've got to try it out.
Actually, it's a very interesting instrument and there is some merit to it. Dr. Bass and I worked on it for quite a long time. It was a way to turn things around so that you could kind of gauge what is the actual knowledge that a non-black person has about the black tradition in higher education. The idea would be, given your level, to then provide things that would help you to elevate your knowledge. That was the concept.

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So after you hooked up with Dr. Bass, you went on and wrote your dissertation, and then came to MIT. How did that come about?
I decided I didn't necessarily have to go back to Hampton, because in the last couple of years that I was at UConn, Dr. Holland took an ambassador's position to go to Sweden. He became the first black U.S. ambassador to Sweden. Therefore, I did not need to necessarily go back to Hampton, and I started applying for jobs. There was an ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for an assistant dean of the Graduate School at MIT, the idea being that the dean would really try to increase the number of minority students on this campus. I liked what it said in terms of what it was going to try to do. I knew that Dr. Holland was on the Corporation at MIT. Between my wife and me, we always kept in touch with him and his wife; we wrote him and all that; we stayed connected with him and with Dr. Edmonds, all these people. So when I saw that job opening, I made contact with him. At the time, I think he was still in Sweden. He encouraged me to apply, so I did.

I guess there were about two hundred people who applied. I applied for the job and got an interview. So I came up here, I guess it was in the summer, and there were something like six people who were in the finalist category. I had never experienced anything like this, all six candidates on campus at the same time. One person would be coming out of the meeting, and then the rest of the people would be sitting out here and going in. All of us would meet at lunch and talk, and all of us were trying to get the same job. I just thought it was the most unusual thing I had ever seen in my life. Shirley Jackson was on the search committee, and Linda Sharpe and a number of other students. I thought it was the most unusual place I had ever seen in my life.

So anyway, it turns out that the students liked me considerably. It was obvious to me that the students were the ones who were going to make the major decision about this position.

Were the other candidates black or white?
All of the people were black, I would say. There may have been another minority person there, but I think pretty much all of them were black.

Anyway, it turned out that they selected me to be the person. I had not actually received my degree, although I had finished all the work at UConn. Irwin Sizer, who was the dean of the Graduate School at the time, called and told me that I had been nominated and that the only holdback would be that I prove I had actually finished my degree, even if it were not going to be awarded until that following May. We got that straightened out. Everything was okay and we moved up here. By this time, there were four of us—our younger son, Alton, was about two years old.

So you came in as assistant dean of the Graduate School.
In fact, I was the first black to hold a position as a dean in the Graduate School office.

Where was John Turner at that time?
John had not come yet. John actually took my job after I was promoted to special assistant to the president. I came here in 1972 as the assistant dean.

You got your Ph.D. in three years?
I started in '69 and I finished in '72. I could possibly have finished it a little earlier.

That's highly unusual, three years. Then you came up here in '72 as assistant dean.
When I came here in 1972, my charge was twofold, at least as I saw it. One was to increase the number of minority students on the graduate level, and second, to try to work on developing a mechanism—a very good retention program—to make sure they didn't fall through the cracks once they got here. I focused on that immediately. I began to try to pull together a sort of think-tank group, which would consist of black faculty members and black graduate students—minority students, I must say, because there was one young Hispanic woman who worked on that committee—and then really try to comb the country to see if we could identify more outstanding black and other minority students.

I worked under the dean of the Graduate School, Irwin Sizer, for two years, until '74.

What was Mary Rowe doing at that time? I remember she was just getting started up.
Mary, if I remember correctly, came to MIT in 1973. They created this position called "special assistant for women and work." That was in 1973. But then, evidently the blacks started pressing the institution about having a person of the same caliber. They asked me to be special assistant for minority affairs, so I took that position in 1974.

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When did you meet Paul Gray?
I met him when I first came here, because the Task Force on Educational Opportunity had been the major instrument to have this position of assistant dean for minority graduate students created.

When did you become close friends? Was he chancellor at that time?
Yes, he was chancellor. He was the one who came down to the Graduate School office and asked me if I would be willing to work with him and Jerry Wiesner, as special assistant for minority affairs. Then when I went up there at that time, it turned out that the president's position had been divided. The chancellor, Paul, was running the day-to-day operations of the institution so that the president, Jerry, could go out and raise money. If you recall, that's when they started this big campaign. So all of the top people actually worked with Paul instead of Jerry. That's the way they wanted it, because Jerry wanted to spend more time fund-raising. So I began working very closely with Paul. Walter Rosenblith was the provost at the time.

You stayed in there, but from time to time you'd take up assignments. Didn't you have some connection with OME?
Yes. From '74 to '84, I was the special assistant for minority affairs, then in 1980, they asked me—I guess through Paul—if I would be the acting director of the Office of Minority Education, along with holding the position as special assistant. So I ended up holding two positions.

During this period of time, there were a lot of issues around affirmative action compliance. The Bakke case came in. I think affirmative action really started taking hold around '72, where the government wanted equal opportunity compliance and so forth. Weren't you on the EO committee as well? How did that work? You were the EO officer for MIT, weren't you?
Not at that time.

Was that Constantine Simonides?
Constantine had always been, but he always had an assistant who was called the assistant equal opportunity officer. That person has always been black and has basically run the operation.

But you were that for some time, weren't you?
Yes, but that's a little further down the road. Patricia Garrison was the first, and Ike Colbert was the second, to serve as assistant equal opportunity officer.

When did you take over?
I took over in '84.

But as special assistant for minority affairs, if there were instances of discrimination or something like that, you would look into those, wouldn't you?
Yes. We had kind of a mixed bag in a way, because a part of the assistant equal opportunity officer's job was to investigate issues that related to employment discrimination. As ombudspeople, Mary Rowe and I had an arm of our job to look into any issues that were dealing with discrimination.

But you didn't take that job until '84.
Those two special assistant positions were created to support those two particular groups.

In 1974, you take this new position, special assistant to the president; Mary takes her position, special assistant for women and work. As part of your job, I always thought there was an equal opportunity component and I always thought there was an ombudsman component.
Basically, when I took the job in '74, there were two areas that we had the flexibility to develop, but it was very clear that some of the components were supposed to be a part of our job. One of the aspects of the job was to advise the president and senior officers about the kinds of minority programs and issues that existed on campus, and even to make suggestions about how those things might be enhanced in a positive way. I also had the chance to develop different kinds of programs for minority folks, whether it be faculty, administrators, or whatever. I had a chance to be creative in that arena, especially with issues relating to minority concerns and complaints.

So you were their eyes and ears for issues relating to minorities.
Right. My job, as I saw it, was that if I had ideas about issues that I thought were important, based on the constituencies of minorities and faculty or whatever, I saw that as my responsibility to make sure the administration knew what those issues were, and would develop rapport with staff, faculty, and so forth.

I had a pretty wide range of opportunities to do what I wanted to do, and that's why I liked it. If I wanted to develop some way of being able to bring black faculty together, and they would be willing to do it, then I could do that. Or, if I wanted to try to do something with black

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administrators, I could do that. With support staff minority folks, if I wanted to do something, I saw that as a means of being able to do that. And I could. I tried to develop some ways of being able to get some feedback from them, so that whatever their needs were would get to the administration. I couldn't always make sure it was going to happen, but my feeling was that at least I could get the ideas and issues to them. That's what I said I would do for Paul and Jerry.

What kind of access did you have to Paul and Jerry? Would you on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis sit them down and identify some of the issues around the Institute? How did that work?

I think at one point we had a schedule where I would meet with Paul maybe once a month, but I had access to him at any point. If there was a problem or an issue that I thought needed to be brought to his attention, I could call and tell his secretary that I needed to see him, and I would be able to see him fairly soon. Or I could talk to him by phone.

So I had the chance to be able to communicate with him, but I didn't meet with him too frequently. It wasn't my interest. I didn't want to be seen as always under somebody. I don't think I would have had the kind of respect I thought was needed, in order to be able to tell people—particularly whites, no matter who they were—what they needed to hear, as opposed to what they wanted to hear. If I had to be a person to bring good news or bad news, I always felt I had to at least have a certain amount of independence to be able to do that. I always tried to fight for that. The best way is to not be hanging around people all the time.

But it's a two-edged sword. You've got to have the access, but you don't want it to be too much because, as you say, you want some kind of independence.

Let's look at the period from 1974 to 1984, before you took on this job as acting director of OME. Let's call that the early period. If you had to isolate that as a time, how would you characterize what meant most to you in terms of your accomplishments there?

I think I did a fairly decent job of trying to get black people to communicate with each other. It's very clear here—when I looked at it in general, particularly after being in this institution during the period 1974 to 1984, that as goes the faculty, so goes this institution. Anything you're going to do that's going to be worth anything, you're going to have to have the senior faculty involved in some way with some influence on it. I have always felt, and still do feel, that one of the things I should try to do was to get some voice out of that black faculty group and black administrators. I focused as much as I could on trying to develop things that would allow those groups to be able to say and do whatever they thought they needed to say or do that would help the environment be better for them.

Do you think they did anything? As you look back on those ten years now, and hearing what you just said, what events or circumstances would you point to as evidence that some of that happened?

There were periods of time when there was a core group of maybe six or seven black faculty members who were able to develop some ideas about things, and to at least talk about issues. One thing I learned very quickly was that, individually, all of the black faculty members were just very interesting and very good people to work with. I think on an individual basis I had a very positive kind of relationship with them. When you brought them together, it just never worked out very well, but if you talked to them on an individual basis, it was very positive. I just eventually had to accept the fact that it's just very difficult, for lots of reasons, to get this group of people to do anything together. But I think that's true for any group.

How did Paul respond to this?

I think he probably was frustrated, too. One of the beauties of the place in one sense, but one of the difficult things also, was that he had this open-door policy. All of the black faculty members, like any other faculty member, could go in and out and talk to Paul anytime they wanted to, and make suggestions and all that. I think what he probably witnessed in a more detailed way, more so than I did, was getting information that came from each one of these different faculty members who would always go in to see him and talk to him about things.

I think one of the things that was the most difficult was trying to get a black faculty member to take over OME. I think that was a very frustrating time for him. I remember him talking about that. He had become president in 1980.

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The first six years, '74 to '80, when he was chancellor and you were working with Wiesner, were you closer to Paul than to Jerry?
Yes, I think so. I think it was mainly because of the way it was structured up there. The chancellor was actually serving as president, handling all of the day-to-day affairs; Jerry was just not available, and he made that very clear. He had another duty, and that's why they put up the chancellor's position, for that person to be the president on campus. So I dealt with Paul more than Jerry. I must say, though, I did talk to Jerry periodically—not very much, but I found him to be the most understanding non-black person about issues regarding race of anybody I have talked to on this campus to this day. That guy really understood and he was very supportive.

Did you have any contact with Constantine?
I didn't actually get to know Constantine until I became the assistant equal opportunity officer. I thought I knew him, but I did not know him until I started working very closely with him. I saw Constantine during that time as a guy who was like John Haldeman: the guy standing in the door, blocking. But on the other hand, he was a very productive guy. I could tell that Jerry and Paul depended on him a great deal. His commitment or view about affirmative action wasn't clear then. But I never agreed with the concept of a vice-president being the equal opportunity officer and then having an assistant equal opportunity officer, who happened to be black, have to go through that person, who would then take the information to the most important administrative body that we have, the Academic Council. I have never agreed with that.

I don't quite understand how it worked.
This was before I became assistant equal opportunity officer and special assistant. During the period of 1974 to 1984, there was Patricia Garrison, Ike Colbert, and then there was Patricia Bell-Scott. All of these people served as assistant equal opportunity officer. Their job was actually to do all of the legwork. They would get all the data from departments and so forth, they would put up these charts, and they would put this plan together—how many people were hired, how many were black, how many were women, and so forth and so on. Then they would relate these ideas as to what they went through in order to select a person, that they couldn't find any blacks or whatever the case might be. But they would have to compile all the information and essentially give it to Constantine, and he would go to the Academic Council and be the spokesperson as the equal opportunity officer.

Now, he did a lot of the work in terms of getting what he needed. I'm not trying to belittle what he did, because he was very good, but the structure was that he was the equal opportunity officer. When it came down to any decision about anything, he made it. He would ask my opinion, he would ask people their opinions, but, in the final analysis, he would make the decision and Paul would make the decision about what direction the Institute was going to go.

So you don't think your opinion carried the influence it should have carried?
I don't think any of those people had the influence they should have had. I think it boiled down to not having a minority person as the head of that area.

How was this dealt with? Obviously, you must have voiced this concern to different people from time to time. It had some ways of becoming known.
I can't say I said much about not liking the system. I have said it, and in fact, I guess within a year's time of being special assistant to the president, in 1975, I wrote a memo to Jerry and Paul. I told them it was a disgrace to have twenty-three academic departments and for at least half of those departments to have no black academic faculty members at all. I told them it was not going to happen unless there were some very strong decisions made about doing something about it. And I named several things. What happened was that they wrote me back these harsh letters as if I was crazy. So I said, "These people are not serious."

So right at the beginning, after a year, you knew there needed to be a stronger level of commitment than you had seen.
It was clear to me that there was a major problem, and there still is today, in that the top administration—the presidents, the provosts of this institution—will do only so much in putting pressure on academic departments to bring in more blacks and other folks of color.

What could they do? What can they do?
During that period of time, I do give the top administration—the president and Constantine and others in the top administration—credit for at least

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laying out things that would not allow departments to use excuses as to why they could not do something. If you go back and look at the funds that the top administration provided for academic departments, at one point it became outrageous. When I mentioned it at other institutions, they couldn't believe that the administration would allow a department not to do anything, given the approval of a position beyond its allocated number and additional monetary support of approximately $30,000 if it would appoint a black or any minority person. In many cases, the same plan was available for the appointment of women. If you found a person you wanted to bring in, the administration would give the department an additional position and money to help that person do his or her research, or help that person move in the direction that would be most feasible to the department. The administration developed that kind of plan, but it didn't make any major difference.

But what could the administration have done? This is an example of something it did do, and it didn't work. So I'm asking you what kind of actions could it have taken that it didn't take, and that you think it should have taken, that you think would have worked?
What I think it could have done was take the corporate position, that a department head or a dean of a school is placed in a position for a reason, and that if he does not meet his goals, he should eventually be replaced.

Okay, so you have all these people stepping down. What's going to happen next? You're going to have deanless schools and headless departments. Where is that going to get you? The Institute is going to fold up, nobody to run it.
I don't think so. I think all you have to do is have a couple of examples of doing that, and also giving a school that does perform some accolades that the faculty can appreciate.

They gave them not accolades but money. Could there also have been a structural problem that this EO situation—the EO assistant director or director or whatever—didn't have the mechanism to deal with faculty appointments, that they could better deal with staff and administrative appointments? They had much more leverage there, and it probably had something to do with the way faculty appointments are made. For example, as assistant director of EO, you weren't brought into the up-front process of recruitment of faculty members, were you?
No, that's left up to the department, so to some extent it's a reporting mechanism after the fact. We would meet with department heads and talk about different strategies and make suggestions. Then we would go away and they would do what they wanted; we had no hand in the process.

But even in talking about things you could do, that really wasn't your office's expertise; it doesn't really know how the profession is running and working and how recruitment would take place in that area. Is that fair?
I think that's fair.

So it was a job you couldn't succeed at. If you look at the structure of the job, it's probably a job that's very difficult to succeed at, in making things happen.
I couldn't agree with you more. I think the problem is that even the top administration didn't know how to structure it in a way that they could make a difference.

But here you are in this job: equal opportunity officer. What were the frustrations for you, personally? Here you are in a job that structurally, one could almost say, was doomed to fail.
My experience in that position was that I actually got to the point where I thought it was just a job. An incident occurred that really let me know it was hopeless, that we weren't going to do anything here. It was *devastating* to me. There were two black faculty members whom we had groomed, and we had an opportunity to hire them. There was James Gates, who actually did his undergraduate work here, came through Project Interphase, went on to get his Ph.D. here, went down as a Harvard Fellow, went all over the world and became a world class physicist, and came back as an assistant professor here, and then asked his department—after he had gotten an offer from the University of Maryland as a tenured associate professor—to just simply give him an opportunity to prove himself, if they would make him an associate professor without tenure. That's all he would ask and he would stay. John Turner, Wes Harris, and I went to the department head, who said, "No, we're not going to do it."

Second is the Jim Hubbard case. Jim was an undergraduate, a transfer student. I met him at Morgan State. They had taught him everything they could at Morgan State. They didn't have anything else they could teach him at the end of his *junior* year. He was so bright. Jim entered MIT and his courses at Morgan were applied only as fulfill-

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ing the humanities requirement, which reduced him to something like a second-semester freshman. He came in and still was determined. This guy goes through the undergraduate program. He became so good that they put him in the graduate program and he got all these awards, best teacher and all that. They made him a professor here. He was selected by the department to get tenure, and for the first time in the history of the School of Engineering, as I understand it, his case went up to the Engineering Council and they turned him down, telling him to wait another year. He was so upset he said he wasn't going to stay. These are two MIT people who came straight through.

What was your role? Did you have a role to play in trying to shepherd these cases through?
In terms of the role I had as assistant equal opportunity officer, I asked John and Wes and some people and we went and talked to the head of the department about Jim Gates. You basically have no power to get people to do anything other than to influence them, so all you can do is try to provide as much influence as you can.

In the case of Jim Hubbard, same thing. Here you've got the control of a situation by the School Council, composed of the heads of departments in the School of Engineering. I've had enough experiences with a number of those people, and it's clear to me that there's nothing that's going to happen there from the top. So you just try to use your influence. You talk to people and tell them you think this is something that should not happen, and something should be done about it to make a difference. But if they don't, what are you going to do?

So you exert the effort and it comes to naught. What do you do? Here you are—if you were a surgeon, it's like operating in the operating room and your patient dies. It's not that drastic, but it's not a success. It's a casualty, in some sense. I ask my surgeon friends this, so I'm not just asking you, how does one internalize that over a period of time? I know these are issues you care a lot about. How does it affect you?
I'll tell you how it affected me. It was clear to me that nothing was going to happen of any magnitude, particularly after I witnessed those two cases. The only thing I would say is that you have to do what you can to work with your own people, and hopefully some good will come from that, in the sense that it will at least help them to understand what I have come to understand—that the only way anything is going to happen is that some group of us has to analyze and develop a strategy that is pressed upon the people who are in control.

So in other words, it made you redirect your efforts into coming up with some activity focused more on black people than on trying to get white people to help black people.
No doubt about it.

That's a pretty radical position. I think it's strong, but you've come to this over a period of time.
How can I put it? I don't believe we can get anybody to do anything here. It has nothing to do with talent. It's almost like seeing us dying out. I don't even see the replacement of those of you who have a remote understanding of what I think it requires.

But here you are, the perfect example of someone who has dedicated enormous energy from the beginning of your career, coming here in '72 to the Graduate School office and then moving to the president's office and staying with it—and we haven't even gotten beyond '84. You put enormous effort and commitment in, and it seems to me you're concluding that the results don't match that effort and commitment. That was working with the MIT structure and framework. Now you seem to think that, if there's any hope, it's redirecting that in a different way, toward blacks themselves and getting them to put forth their own accomplishments, almost like a self-help situation. You must have a different view of the Institute after going through those years.
I think there's a totally different viewpoint. When I think about when I came here in 1972, and if I think about what I know now, I would have been much more radical as an advocate for black folks to be more direct, even if it was no more than a small number of them, in terms of what they would demand that they have as a base here.

I remember an incident that happened in my hometown, where a white man came into our community, which was common. If you wanted work, like on a Saturday morning, you would get up early and a man would come into the neighborhood on his truck and pick up some people who wanted to crop tobacco. So about six or seven of us, we were in high school, got on the truck and he took us out maybe ten or fifteen miles to his farm. He promised he was going to pay us a certain amount of money. We went out there and

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cropped tobacco. Then when we finished, he said to us, "You boys didn't do all that well. I can only give you fifty cents as opposed to seventy-five cents an hour." So what are you going to do? I'm not sure the analogy works well, but do you understand what I'm saying?

I've seen people who clearly are not any better than many of us, and yet they're able to get these different positions. They get in authority to be able to make decisions about issues related to things that are related to affirmative action, but we can't even get a system designed whereby we can put a person of color in a probative position to make decisions in that regard. That says to me that we're dealing with people who think they are acting "for real," but they're not. I like Chuck and I like Paul, but they can't answer that question for me. They really can't, because I've seen it. I've seen how we have dealt with it.

I come out of a background just like yours, where I'm prepared to be as nice as possible and work with people. But after a certain point, when I know that people are not acting "for real," I don't have a choice but to work mainly with my own people. In fact, that's the main reason I'm doing this project, so that at least for the next generation, there is some understanding of how we had to go through this system. My feeling is that each and every one of us ought to have the chance to say whatever we want to say, because it's our life.

So this project really is your swan song. It is a new direction in your life, and it's a good note to tell someone good-bye on.

However, I would like for people—my people—to have a chance to say what they want to say about their experiences here. I also think there are some people, non-black folks, who, through my ombudsman position and working with them over the years, I have found—whether I disagreed or agreed with them—that they at least have made some effort to do something about this whole issue of affirmative action. They have had all kinds of different positions, but at least they've had a position and they've done something in that regard. Almost everybody I have interviewed who is non-minority has done something. I have sat on committees with them, I've watched papers that have come through in terms of their positions, what they've done, I've talked to people who have come in to me with complaints about a system where black people have been mistreated. Those who are non-black have been people about whom blacks have said, "These are people who have been very helpful to me."

It was in '84 that you became assistant equal opportunity officer?

Yes. I did take on the position as assistant equal opportunity officer, and stayed in that position until '94, along with other things. I guess that's when I really saw even more how flawed that process is, and how the programs basically, in my opinion, were simply to provide a place for the Department of Labor to come and just skirt the issue, frankly.

There were two problems with it, and I found myself in a position where I didn't see anything that could be done. One was that we had major problems in the system here within MIT. Then when you had the Department of Labor, the Office of Contract Compliance programs, come in to supposedly be the examiner, the people they would send over here had had no exposure to a university. The fact is, they just had no sense about how a university runs. They weren't equipped educationally and they didn't have the kind of academic background to be able to challenge people, so they were no help.

The faculty could tell them anything.

And they would go away believing it, so they were no help at all. It was a joke. You got no help from outside. I give the administration credit, and I'm a part of it in the sense that they tried to change the process every once in a while, but we just generated a lot of paperwork and nothing was happening. Finally, they decided to do away with the paperwork and just simply have the people indicate what they had done.

That's clearly frustrating, but there were some good parts. You did the Martin Luther King thing. You've run that every year. Tell me your feelings about that.

I guess there are about three things I would say I feel extremely good about. Again, it boils down to dealing with issues related to us. I think the most successful thing I was a part of here, with the other black administrators here, was the two conferences that we developed in 1982 and 1984. I think we were in very high gear, in terms of our level of thinking and our level of working together. Unfortunately, I never thought we quite got there

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with the faculty, but we had some segments of it periodically.

Did that result in a publication?
Yes, it did, for each one of them. John Turner and I were the co-chairpersons. He played a major role, as well as myself and other administrators. I think that was quite an accomplishment. I also think the effort of maintaining the Martin Luther King program was something we ought to be proud of. Beyond that, I think if I had started sooner, I would be even more ahead with the teaching of my course—"Bridging Cultural and Racial Differences"—and in developing other courses on racial issues.

But I think those are the only things, actually, when I look back. There's not much more I can say about it. The other thing is just meeting some very beautiful black folks and other minority folks. The students are just fabulous.

There is something else I want you to say something about. Really, it's very touching—and that is the success of your family and your children, in particular. They didn't just turn out this way. You made some right decisions somewhere.
Well, I can say a couple of things about it. We have two sons—Clarence Jr. and Alton Leroy, named after his paternal grandfather. Clarence Jr., of course, is named after me. But I have to say that the person who really has been the most important person in my family has been my wife, Mildred. She did a couple of things that I think are quite remarkable. She had her educational background and career. In fact, she had a very good job at Harvard before she decided that, with Clarence and Alton in elementary school, we were going to really have some hard times if there weren't some real attention paid to them when they were in the second and third grade. Being just about the only blacks in these schools, she decided that, first of all, they would be in the only school where there was a black principal in the entire Newton public school system. She just stopped working to pay attention to what was going on with those guys, and delayed her career. I think that says probably more than anything else I can say about her commitment to her sons.

I think both of us have come from families where our parents didn't have anything financially. They were poor, but they had a high regard for education and they sacrificed for it. I think both of us have always felt that money, if we had money, should be put in a place where they would be able to get a better education, and we would do that as opposed to acquiring material things. We've always tried to do that.

We realized, when Clarence finished the sixth grade, that the middle schools in Newton were really not as structured as we felt they should be for him as a black male in the system. So we decided to send him to Buckingham, Browne & Nichols in Cambridge. We didn't have the money, but we thought we would get it from somewhere. We felt for two reasons that it would be good. We knew that it would challenge him, and that if we stayed supportive, he would probably come out okay, but at least he would be sound in terms of his education. I happen to have been on the board there and I had a chance to see his school from the top. I was just amazed as to the kind of support that that school provides for the kids.

He finished there, and he was the second black president of the student body. There had only been one other, a black male, who had been president of the student body in that school. Clarence was very involved—established a cultural awareness club to bring all students together in his sophomore year, and rowed crew. He has very positive feelings about his high school. He graduated from Wesleyan University, worked a couple of places, and came back and got his MBA here at MIT, of which we are very proud. He's now working at an investment firm in New York City.

Our younger son, Alton, after he finished Newton in the sixth grade, went to a private school as well. But he wanted his own place, so he went to Beaver Country Day School in Chestnut Hill. He stayed there for two years and felt he wasn't as challenged as he wanted to be there, so he went to Phillips Academy in Andover. There he was challenged and involved, got an excellent education, and met some very outstanding people. Then he came to MIT and got his undergraduate degree in chemistry. He left here and went to Yale University Medical School. From there, he decided he wanted to go to law school, so he went to the University of North Carolina School of Law at Chapel Hill, which is where he is now. He hopes to finish in June, and from there he plans to complete his residency program in medicine.

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So you think Mildred was very crucial in those early years?
Oh, I don't think it would ever have happened without her. There would have been so many things that would have happened centered around their education and social issues—friendships, baby-sitters, and so forth. There was a whole set of issues that Clarence and Alton would have had to work out by themselves, that crucial period of appreciating and understanding self and values, that very tough period of early adolescence.

When you came here, you decided to live in Newton. Was that a hard decision?
Not exactly, and I'll tell you why we moved there. Mildred was the one who found the section in which there was a black principal of the elementary school. That's the reason we moved to that area. I think we also just looked at the few black faculty members and other blacks who were here, and where did they stay? Most of them were living in Newton, the ones I got to know very well very quickly.

Willard Johnson.
Willard, and I think Frank Jones lived there at that time.

What did this do in terms of black friends? Did going down to North Carolina provide enough exposure to black people for your sons, or was that never an issue?
It was very much an issue, so we went to North Carolina as often as we could. But even when we were at the University of Connecticut, and even here when the kids were young, we would go to Harlem and walk around. We would spend a day in Harlem to help them understand who they were and see a lot of people who looked liked them in a different environment. We made a special effort to try to do that. While we were at UConn, we would go to Hartford. In fact, Mildred would take Clarence to a day care school in the black community, just to make sure he didn't get too alienated.

Do you go to church now?
Not really. We have not found the kind of church we like. It sounds strange.

Well, you might not like any kind.
That's right. I think I went to church enough when I was growing up. I'm so tired most of the time on Sundays.

Come on, don't give me that. You just don't want to go to church, talking about you're so tired.
I'm serious. I work six days here on this campus.

When you were at Hampton, did you go to church?
I did more than I do here. We had a church on campus, for one thing, and we did go—not a whole lot, though, I must say.

How about your other family?
Oh, they all go to church. They're very much involved with the church—all of them, for the most part. I have a brother who is a minister.

When you go home, do you go to church?
Sometimes. Most of the time when I go home, I go to church, particularly now.

Is there anything we didn't cover?
Not a lot. I will say, though, that it's a very strange place here, in the sense that you enjoy being here, but you don't. It's a very contradictory kind of statement.

You're more in urban studies now, aren't you?
I would say probably I'm moving more in that direction. Particularly after I finish this project, I would say that I would be probably more in that arena. I would like to get another project and continue my work in ombudsmanship. I still have an interest in issues related to minority efforts, and I don't think I'll ever stop doing that.

You're moving away from the administration.
I think in one way, yes, I hope to. I think I probably will never be involved like I was in the '80s with minority recruitment and affirmative action.

You're not doing day-to-day ombudsman-type things, are you?
I'm still in that arena, but I must say I probably will not do it full-time after this project.

Do you have to adjudicate cases and things like that?
I have to deal with grievances. People will come and talk to me even now. People who just know me want to come and talk about issues, simply because they know I'm much more knowledgeable, maybe, than somebody else.

Don't they have some more ombudsmen here now?
Yes, they do. I think they handle a lot of that now. Otherwise, I would never be able to work on this project.

Well, you've paid your dues.

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You have, too.

That's true. I tell them that, too. I say, "Look, I've paid my dues. You're not going to get me to do this and that," and so forth. That kind of stuff can take up a lot of time, can't it?

A lot of time. As I said, if I didn't have those other people doing the work they're doing, there's no way in the world I could manage. Chuck has been good about that, too. That's the reason he has allowed me to be able to just focus on this project.

So they have been supporting this.

Absolutely. I couldn't ask for a better situation from the president.

Well, I think it's to MIT's advantage. I'm glad they are supportive. That's self-preservation, because this is their stuff. I don't know of anyone at any university who has done anything comparable—not that I've heard about, and I get around.

You not only get around, but you are a historian.

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