

## SAMUEL L. MYERS, JR.

b. 1949, BA 1971 (economics) Morgan State University, PhD 1976 (economics) MIT; assistant professor of economics, University of Texas at Austin, 1976–1980; senior economist, Federal Trade Commission, 1980–1982; associate professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, 1982–1986; professor of economics and director, Afro-American Studies Program, University of Maryland, College Park, 1986–1992; Roy Wilkins Professor of Human Relations and Social Justice, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1992– ; member, Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economic Profession, American Economic Association, 1984–1986.



My father is a past president of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Education. He is an economist, a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1949. He was a professor of economics at Morgan State. He was president of Bowie State College. My mother was a school teacher until my father became a college president. I have one sister who is a judge in Philadelphia and another sister who is now a psychologist in North Carolina.

*It sounds like there was not a question about you going to college. The question was where you would go.*

Well, for most of my life my father assumed that I was going to go to Harvard. When I got to high school, I became a swimmer. I was captain of the swimming team in my senior year in high school. Although I was in the advanced college preparatory curriculum, I think I swam my way through that last year. I won a lot of awards and so forth, but that was for athletics. In fact, I had a coach who said to me one day when I was so impertinent as to suggest that I should study for an exam, “Black people can only do three things—sing, dance, and sports. You can’t sing and you can’t dance, so your future must lie in sports.” Basically, he was saying, “Swimming is what you ought to be devoting your life to.”

Much to my father’s dismay, I did devote myself to swimming. He came into my bedroom one night, I guess I was in my sophomore or junior year of high school, and he said, “You see this? This is my renewal form for the Harvard Alumni Association.” He tore it up. He said, “You’re not going to Harvard, I’m not paying the

money.” But anyway, I think he was very disappointed that I spent so much of my time focusing on sports.

About the time I got up to my senior year in high school, the range of opportunities had declined considerably. So, in a way, going to Morgan was like going to the only place that I could get in. I think I had something like a 67 grade point average when I graduated from high school.

*How did you get to MIT? What events led to you going to MIT to get your Ph.D.?*

The most important thing was that a big transformation occurred for me at Morgan. If I had not gone to Morgan, I would never have gone to MIT. I think going to Morgan gave me an opportunity to focus more explicitly on using the tools and skills of economics in order to solve the problems



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of minority communities. As long as I was in an environment where people pushed me in my own abilities, I couldn't help but develop the focus of how I could use the tools and skills for purposes other than a job, for purposes other than simply myself. What Morgan did was instill the vision and the sense of commitment to use these skills and tools for a purpose.

Much of my time at Morgan was spent debating, a very vigorous interaction with my colleagues about the nature of black America and the problems that minorities tend to discuss. About that same time, you had Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown and others. There was this one guy named Tiger Davis, who was a rabble-rouser on campus, but he subsequently became a state senator or a member of the Maryland house of delegates. But there was a lot of excitement on campus about revolution. We were talking about how we could transform the world. I remember one day the whole campus went down and marched on Annapolis in order to protest the inequities in funding, Morgan's versus the University of Maryland.

So that transformation occurred in an environment of intellectual ferment among the African-Americans on campus. There was a tremendous amount of support by the faculty members at Morgan. There was one faculty member who had been the president or vice-president of the American Philosophical Association. He had his Ph.D. from Yale. His name is Richard McKinney. In fact, he's still alive. Dr. McKinney had this philosophy course. He taught the course on the philosophy of western civilization and he really gave us, as African-Americans, the opportunity to debate and discuss issues like—What's the nature of blackness in America? Are we Americans first or are we blacks first?

What happened, I think, is that by the time I got to my senior year at Morgan, there was a substantial expectation on the part of the faculty that I was going to go to Harvard, Yale, MIT, or someplace. They nurtured me and they undid what had happened to me while I was in high school. I was still swimming in college, but I had a swimming coach who put education first. This was Ralph Jones, the son of the president of Grambling University. He died of a heart attack. In fact, he had one of his first heart attacks when we were losing to Howard University in the champi-

onships. You might recall that the coach of the Howard University swimming team at the time was Clarence Pendleton, a person who went along to become a very conservative leader in the Reagan administration.

But the fact is that my existence at Morgan helped to overcome some of the negative things that happened in high school and helped me prepare for MIT. In high school, I was in the class with all of the smart people. You kind of think, "How could I have gotten into class with smart people if I weren't smart?" But yet, nobody valued that about me. It was kind of a sense that, "Well, you'll go to the University of Maryland, swim at the University of Maryland and so forth," whereas the horizon was set higher when I got to Morgan.

So, for example, I went to a summer program at Washington University, St. Louis. I got real excited about that. I thought that maybe I'd go to Washington University, St. Louis, and get my Ph.D. But my professor said, "Oh, no no no. You can do better than Washington University, St. Louis." Somebody came up with Johns Hopkins. So I said, "Well, I'll apply to Johns Hopkins. It's a real good school." My advisors at Morgan said, "Well, no. You can apply there, but you can do better." So then I applied and got admitted to Harvard and got admitted to MIT. I went up to Harvard and talked to someone in admissions and another Harvard faculty member. I got admitted, but with no financial aid. I was asking questions because I had gotten financial aid at all the other places. I was asking, "What is the financial aid situation?" Harvard simply said, "Well, you know, do a good job and in your second year we'll make you a teaching assistant."

I went down the street to MIT, walked into the reception area, and said, "My name is Samuel Myers." "You are Samuel Myers?!? We have been trying so hard to get you. We've been calling you and calling you." They said, "Can you stay and go to lunch? We wanted you to sit in on Paul Samuelson's class and we wanted you to sit in on Bob Solow's class. We want you to meet Duncan Foley." I called home and said, "I'm not coming home on Sunday because I'm going to stay for a couple more days." They wine and dined me. They had me sit in on a class. What's so interesting is that the class I was sitting in for Samuelson was the welfare class. Some of the topics that we talked about that day I had been studying at Morgan. The

substance was very technical and so forth, but at least that one day I was sitting in class I knew what they were talking about. I could jump into the conversation.

So I felt psyched up about that experience. There was one professor, whose name I won't mention, who discouraged me from coming. His argument was, "Get on the blackboard and derive the demand curve from the utility function." I got to the blackboard and I wrote the utility function there and I wrote down the budget constraint. But frankly, I had not really mastered the technique of grinding out the answers. So he suggested that I might go to Swarthmore for a "post-baccalaureate" year, because coming from a historically black college I might need some extra training. But that was the only person who said that. Everybody else said, "Well, we've got people from philosophy, from history, from art, and engineering. In other words, we have people from different backgrounds coming to MIT to the economics department, so even if you haven't had topology,"—which I had not had—"we'll teach you what you need to do."

That's another thing that happened in the interviews and in the process. I had already been admitted. They were giving me a lot of money to come, but I think another thing that happened was that there was a confidence in me that they had—with the exception of this one guy, whose classes I never took. There were a couple of people who were really well known for being hostile toward the black experience, but I didn't take their classes. In fact, the differences in experiences that we as black students had are very much related to which faculty members we interacted with. I interacted with a group of faculty like Paul Samuelson, Bob Solow, Mike Piore, Duncan Foley, and so forth. These guys really and truly supported us.

*Sam, you also had a core group of black students.*

It didn't happen right away. The year before I came, there were three black Americans in the economics department.

*What year was that?*

I came in '71. In 1970 there was the first group. There were three of them. They were Harry Minor, whose name is now something else, which I can't remember.

*Hassan Minor.*

That's right. Harry was there that first year in 1970. There was Dick Winstead.

*Was Glenn there at that time? Glenn Loury, was he there?*

Glenn came in 1972. I can't remember who the third person was, but you might note that none of those three people from the first class got their Ph.D.'s in economics, not from the economics department. Harry got his Ph.D. from—?

*Urban studies and planning.*

Right. Dick Winstead is still at Morehouse and he is ABD, "all but dissertation." In my class, there were three. There was Alvin Headen.

*From A&T.*

Maybe there were four. No, there were three. There was a woman from NYU who got married to somebody in the physics department. The two of them left. When he finished his Ph.D., they went down to New York. But she dropped out. She did real well on the exams, but she basically wasn't interested in doing what the MIT people were doing. Alvin took a long time to finish, but eventually he did finish. He's tenured now.

*Where is he?*

North Carolina State University. He got tenure two years ago or last year or something like that. He had two jobs before. You see, after he finished his coursework, he went to Chicago through the American Medical Association—no, Blue Cross/Blue Shield—and worked on that for a while. He then went to North Carolina A&T. Maybe I have that wrong. Maybe he went to North Carolina A&T first. He finished his dissertation while he was working at the American Medical Association and Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Then he started off as an assistant professor at North Carolina State. He got promoted a couple years ago.

So there were three in 1970, three in 1971, three in 1972—Glenn Loury, Ron Ferguson, and Keith Lynch, I think. I think Keith came in there too. Then there were three in 1973. By 1975, you had fifteen. The problem is we had fifteen, but still nobody had gotten their degree. Glenn and I finished in 1976, so we were the first two African-Americans to get their Ph.D.'s. Then in '76, '77, '78, Sandy Darity came and he finished up very quickly, faster than anybody had ever finished before. But by 1980, they had pretty much stopped admitting African-American students—maybe one here and one there, but not in any considerable mass.

*Never like that.*

There had been an experiment, and they concluded from the experiment that it didn't work. In 1984, I was appointed to the visiting committee of the economics department. By that time, I had already gone through the University of Texas and I was back. I was tenured then at the University of Pittsburgh. What I discovered was that people had changed their views on admitting blacks, to admitting minorities. We had one of my former students from the University of Texas, who was born in Oklahoma and had some small part of American Indian in him, and they had him up there under the category of American Indian. They had a bunch of Asian students, and so forth. Their conceptualization of minorities kind of drifted away from historically disadvantaged minorities.

I'm not so sure I could say how I was historically disadvantaged, except to say that when my father got his Ph.D. in economics from Harvard in 1949, there were no job opportunities for him at a major research university. After the year he spent as an economist at the Department of Labor, then a historically black college was pretty much the only opportunity. The effect of that, as well as the effect of that among all black economists, was that the technology of doing economics was different between blacks and whites. So even though I came from a middle-class family, the barriers that my father faced and his generation faced still closed opportunities, but in a very different way. There was an explicit door that prevented him from having the kind of a job that would permit him to excel as a mainstream, technically trained economist. That's an explicit kind of thing. The type of barrier I faced was a barrier where, having gone to a historically black college, there was a perception that I was less qualified. The kinds of coursework, the kinds of training I had had, were presumed to make me less than equal. Therefore, you had to have some sort of compensatory activity so that I would be equal. So one of the things that I had to carry on my shoulder, as I was going through the process, was to prove to people at MIT that I could do the work.

What I think is kind of intriguing is to look at the three different generations. In my father's generation, there's an explicit barrier. In my generation, there were differences in the training that we had received prior to the time I got to MIT, but not because of explicit discrimination. It's kind

of hard to say that Sam Myers couldn't have gone to Harvard as an undergraduate because of discrimination. In other words, it's more realistic and honest to say that Sam Myers swam his way through high school and therefore he went to Morgan. A side remark, though, is that integration opened up a prestigious white public high school to me, but integration did not provide me with the nurturing environment that a historically black college may provide for you. In fact, I would argue that if I had gone to Douglass High School or Dunbar High School, then I probably would have gone on to Harvard. Then it becomes a question of whether or not an eighteen-year-old black at Harvard in 1968 is somebody more or less likely to go on to MIT.

I wonder if I had gone to a place like Columbia, because I was really thinking about going to Columbia or Georgetown. I suspect that I probably would have become a lawyer. I probably would have graduated and started making a lot of money, because there's really no money in doing a Ph.D. in economics. They're completely different kinds of career profiles. I just convinced myself and resolved myself to the fact that I'm never going to make any money. I'm happy with the fulfillment that I have received from my publications and my writing and so forth. But I see a lot of pretty wealthy guys out there who came out of my cohort, and I think we just took different kinds of routes.

But you were asking about that group of blacks here. You know, I wrote an article about that? It was in *Phi Delta Kappan*. I wrote it when I was in Africa. I began to write it as I was finishing my dissertation. I went to Africa and I started reflecting on it. The editor changed the title of the paper. In fact, I was commissioned to write the paper for the *Harvard Educational Review*, and they didn't like it. The editor of *Phi Delta Kappan* got a hold of it. They changed my title. The title was some esoteric thing, which I can't remember, but they changed it to "The Agony of the Black Scholar in the White World." That's not my title. I assure you that I did not write that title to that paper. But it got published while I was in Africa. In that article, I discussed the fact that having a large cohort of black people had a substantial positive effect on assuring the intellectual growth of the people in that group. I've talked a lot about it. They all read the paper so they all know what I'm

talking about. A lot of them disagree. Sandy Darity particularly disagrees about some of the issues that I mentioned in that essay and things we've talked about over the years.

By the way, we see each other all the time. Sandy claims that I'm one of the only people who had such a positive experience at MIT. Sandy and Julianne Malveaux and some others have had pretty negative things to say about the experience. The thing is, we used to have meetings every Friday—about this time—in which we debated it. We talked about it. Phyllis Wallace would come in and she would talk about different things she did. One time we had Jim Hefner come in, chairman of the economics department at Morehouse. He came up to talk to us. Some other people came up and just talked about what it's like to be a black economist, what some of the things are that they're expected to do, and so forth.

*Did Brimmer ever come?*

I don't recall Brimmer coming. I remember there was the Westerfield conference down in Atlanta and a bunch of us went down there. Brimmer was down there. Let's put it this way—we received different levels of intellectual stimulation and support from different people in the profession. But it was important that we could talk with one another and ask questions like, "What are these people doing? How do they live their lives? How do they balance the demands of the profession against the expectations of the community?" I think the main point I was trying to make in the article was that having a critical mass of African-Americans was essential.

*I came in '72 and I met with all of you. I went to every department and met with all the black graduate students. I found your department, with that number of students, the most impressive group of black graduate students at MIT. I haven't seen anything to match it yet. At that time, you had maybe ten to twelve people, I thought. What I heard from '72 until '74, when I left the Graduate School office, about all the things that you were doing as a group and how a number of the white professors dealt with all of you, I think it was the most positive group on campus. I made that statement in many places. I may have been wrong on it, but my impression from a distance was positive—I mean, the way you worked with the new students who came into your department, the way the Nobel Prize winners dealt with you for the most part. I didn't see any group like that on*

*campus. Harvard couldn't do it, and I know there was no other department at MIT that was doing as well.*

I don't know about that department, but we really worked hard to work through our differences. We were the first group of blacks, and the way we channeled energy was through things like recruitment and other things. It helped a lot of us. I think it helped create a mission, a sense of vision about why were we here and what we were attempting to achieve. I don't know about the other people in the group, but I'm going to tell you what it did for me—it gave me an unambiguous sense of vision and commitment about why I'm an economist.

*So when you look back at your experience at MIT, what am I hearing you say about your overall experience there?*

I had a great time at MIT. I had a great time. That's the defining point of my career. Everything that had happened before, it was not as clear about what I was going to do. At Morgan, I think it was clear about why I was going to do it—in order to help solve problems in America—but I think it was MIT that gave me the clarity about what I'm going to do. Quite frankly, I think that the twin elements that made it an enjoyable and a positive experience were the critical mass of African-Americans there and a group of highly supportive faculty members. It really helps to have a couple of Nobel Prize winners who are saying, "This makes sense."

Let's go back to the first confrontation we had. The first confrontation we had—the big confrontation—was with the dean of humanities and social sciences. I think this was before Glenn got admitted. We had that meeting talking about how we could assist the university—MIT, the Institute—to increase the number of minority students. But the question was, and it may have been somebody like Harry Minor who raised this question, why should we do all the work if they're not going to let us sit in on the admissions and help to influence decisions? So we went into the dean's office in order to make a demand. The demand was that we get to vote on admissions. The poor dean! My interpretation of his reaction was that he was about to explode. He was furious that this sort of outrageous kind of a demand had been made. You have to remember that I'm talking about something twenty-five years ago, so it may be just a figment of my imagination. But that was my impression, that he was not pleased.

I distinctly remember that Bob Solow was in the room as well. I distinctly remember Bob Solow saying, “Well, you know, that’s not so unusual. It’s not such an unjustified request because they do all the work and help recruit the students. They want to make sure that we get the right ones.” It kind of got narrowed down from sitting on the admissions committee to providing advice and input on the minority candidates, which sounds like I’m saying I don’t care about the white candidates. I felt we walked away with a victory. I do think that having Bob Solow in the room did two things for us. One, it helped us do what we wanted to do. Two, it muted the potential for opposition from white faculty members because Bob Solow was a very respected person.

Let’s go back. Let’s kind of rewind the videotape and look at another scenario. Suppose that the dean had said no. Suppose that Bob Solow wasn’t there or Bob Solow had said, “This is unreasonable.” I suspect that a protracted conflict would have arisen—no this, no that, no that. After a series of no’s, we would have been at each other’s heads. Many of us would have had to choose between loyalty to MIT as opposed to loyalty to the Black Graduate Economics Association. I think it’s quite fortunate that I was never forced to make a choice between my loyalty to MIT and my loyalty to the Black Graduate Economics Association. I suspect that’s because of the support that we got from people like Bob Solow.

*Well, that’s an excellent example. If you had to give an analysis of your perspective on the MIT experience, indicate whether that perspective evolved over time.*

Let me say that Morgan prepared me for MIT. I went to MIT almost like an ambassador from Morgan. Every Christmas, every summer, I went back to Morgan and talked to the faculty members. They gave me this sense of, “Don’t mess up at MIT.” I suspect that I had a clearer sense of why I was at MIT and what I was supposed to be trying to achieve at MIT than some other people may have had. As a result, the experiences that I had were understood within the context of seeing myself as a visitor. I had no illusion that I was going to somehow become one of them. A lot of white students expected to become one of them. As a result, if they didn’t get a job at one of the top-tiered universities, it was a demoralizing experience.

I did not go to MIT with the expectation of becoming one of them. When I got my job offers at places like the RAND Corporation, University of Texas, lots of other state universities and so forth—things sort of considered to be low-quality jobs, if I wanted to do that—I didn’t lose any self-esteem because I didn’t get a job at MIT. Most of the jobs I’ve had were jobs where my MIT degree placed me above many of my colleagues. You might ask, did you aspire to have a job at Princeton or Yale and so forth? The answer is no. I’ve never aspired to have a job at Princeton or Yale. In fact, I really aspired to have a job at either Morehouse or whatever, but I never had anybody offer me a job there. In fact, interestingly enough, when I was at the University of Texas, I interviewed at Florida A&M. I didn’t get the job because the dean of the business school didn’t like me.

*The dean probably was threatened by you.*

I don’t know. The way I look back on my MIT experience is favorable not because of some sort of evolutionary process, but because of my not having set expectations about what MIT was going to do for me. In other words, I never expected that somehow the heights that I would reach would be so much higher because of being at MIT. Therefore, I have never been disappointed, nor have I blamed MIT for my failure to get the best quality jobs. In fact, quite frankly, I’m quite pleased with my career trajectory. I actually preferred my job at the University of Maryland to my job here, but the difference is that I have an endowed chair here and I didn’t have an endowed chair at Maryland.

*Based on your own experience, is there any advice you might offer to other blacks who are entering or planning to enter MIT?*

First of all, as the economics department is currently configured at MIT, I would not go. I would definitely go to Stanford instead.

*Why?*

Because they’ve got some black faculty members up there. They have a critical mass of black students. MIT changed. I sat on the visiting committee and I could see it change right before my eyes. Moreover, I would say that I’m not even sure that I would become an economist now because of some of the dramatic changes that have occurred within the economics profession. One of the shifts

that have gone on in the economics profession is the retrenchment of support for the whole idea that we should use society's resources in order to break down the discriminatory barriers that minorities face, or in order to upgrade the qualifications and skills of minorities. There are a lot of people who have just taken the point of view that that amounts to inefficient allocation of resources. You see, if you believe that I'm qualified and you either believe that opportunities have been in my way or that for other reasons the job relates to my skills, if you believe that, then you'll invest in training and education and so forth. But if you believe I'm dumb, if you believe that I'm inferior, then it makes no sense to even spend a dime on me. In fact, it makes a lot of sense in order to encourage birth control among people in crack communities so they won't reproduce at the same level.

I'm seeing a very drastic move within the economics profession. I was just down at the American Bankers Association—well, actually, it was the National Community Reinvestment Council, and we invited the American Bankers Association to talk about discrimination in mortgage lending. Well, the American Bankers Association economist came and said, "We do not believe that discrimination exists. There is no theoretical basis for believing that it still does. The data that you are using are clearly inappropriate for adequate tests of discrimination. In any event, because blacks are more likely to default on loans, that's consistent with evidence that blacks are less qualified."

*Unbelievable.*

Unbelievable? There's a whole bunch of people like that, even some of my former colleagues from MIT. I'm fed up with these people. It's part of this within the profession. People like Paul Samuelson, Bob Solow, and Dick Eckaus and so forth have no influence anymore on the direction that these people take. This more conservative group has taken over. They've had an incredible impact on the public perceptions about the legitimacy of training, education, and influence. So, in answer to the question about the kind of advice I would give, in all honesty I am not going to be the best recruiter for MIT in order to get more minority people in.

*But the point, though, I think is helpful here. Yes, I can understand that view because I agree that it has*

*changed since you've left, tremendously so. But the question is then, what criteria would you use or would you advise a young Sam Myers to use to decide which school he or she would go to to get the kind of education you got?*

The level of support that you're likely to get for your intellectual development among the faculty, and secondly, the degree of interaction you're likely to experience with other black students. Those are the two things. So I'd look at two things. One thing I'd look at is, how many other black students are there? Another thing I'd look at is either how many black faculty members there are or how many faculty members are regularly writing in support of things that are likely to enhance and advance my well-being. Some people say all you have to do is look at the numbers. Suppose there are a whole bunch of black faculty members, but they're all neo-conservatives. Suppose they're all reactionaries. I don't want to name names, but suppose there are a whole bunch of blacks who are engaging in some sort of self-hate. Obviously just having a bunch of blacks isn't the solution, but nine times out of ten, having large numbers of black faculty is going to be highly correlated with having an environment where it's more receptive to black students.

Now at one point I used to use the word "minority" because I believed that that was the indicator, but I don't know. Sometimes the minorities who make it into positions of leadership and influence, particularly when it's just one, are ones who are kind of picked because of their ideological position. So you go where there's, let's say, an East Asian Indian, and you think that that person is supportive of you. But what if that person is very hostile to affirmative action because of his experiences with some faction in India? Don't think just because you both have brown skin that he's going to be supportive.

*So what I hear you saying is that you may be shifting more from this issue about minority more back to what it was before "minorities" got popular. You're going toward "black."*

The reason the economics department shifted away from blacks to minorities is that it didn't think that the blacks were making it. This is not my imagination. This is confirmed by statements made by officials in the department to the board

of visitors. You don't think I sat on that board of visitors and didn't ask the question, why don't you have more African-Americans?

*Oh, I know you would.*

And when I asked the question, their answer was twofold. One, "We've had great, great difficulty getting African-American students, and the truth is that the retention rate for black students is much lower than the retention rate for whites." That's "fact" number one. Fact number two is the issue of whether or not it was becoming increasingly difficult to find people who "really qualify." This is a line that you hear a lot.

*In fact, you heard it probably during the time when you were coming to MIT.*

There were fifteen of us and they say it was hard to find qualified people?

*Well, only because you and Hassan Minor and others got out there and fought.*

I think there are just as many qualified people out there now as there were before.

*Absolutely. There is no question about it. I think it's more to the point that you made earlier that the fear has just shifted. They've gone more conservative. But it's not only your field, as you well know.*

Another issue that comes to mind, and I'm sure we won't have a lot of time here to talk about it, is the lack of support at MIT for marriage. There's only one black, to the best of my knowledge, who is still married to the person he was married to in college.

*You mean they got married while they were in school?*

Married before they got to MIT, got married while they were at MIT, whatever. One student's first wife insisted that they leave. She said, "I've been putting you through school all these years." I really think that he would have his Ph.D. now had he not left early. His wife was secretary of the social sciences department. I just don't think that there is a recognition and support. I remember somebody saying something to a person who was married at the time. I remember a wife of one of the prominent faculty members saying to that person's wife, "And darling, what do you do?" She said something like she taught home economics. The wife of the prominent faculty member kind of just rolled her eyes and walked away.

Most of us got real excited about the experience of being elevated to a new realm of America,

going up to Vermont to the ski chalet, going to the mansion of one of the faculty members who had a chalet, and so forth. But we're still black people. We still come from our own background and so forth. There was absolutely nothing in place at the time that I was there that would serve as a supportive thing for a relationship. Now, somebody else would have to tell you whether or not all these people who got divorced would still have gotten divorced in any other circumstance. My wife got her Ph.D. from Carnegie-Mellon. I distinctly remember that when we got engaged in 1980, her thesis advisor or somebody advised her against getting married.

*Against getting married?*

Yes, we were already engaged. The date was set. This is a black woman on the faculty at Carnegie-Mellon, divorced and all that, saying, "You know, these men, you can't trust them." She was basically saying, "If you want to be successful and have a successful career as a researcher and a scholar, then don't get married."

I think it's somewhat intriguing when you look at somebody like Cynthia McIntyre. She has gotten discouragement throughout her career from getting married. Somebody like Julianne Malveaux—I'm not quite sure she has wanted to get married, but I do know she hasn't gotten married in these years. You might ask, what's going on there? The answer is that I think I was valued at MIT more as an individual. They don't want you to carry any baggage with you, and if they don't like the baggage that you have with you, they suggest that you leave that baggage behind.

I know of one instance. I've told this story a lot of times and sometimes I wonder if, by telling the story over and over again, the level of truthfulness of it diminishes. But I'm going to tell you that I recall an instance where a faculty member brought a rising star into his office and said, "You are going places. However, that wife of yours, you've got to get rid of her." I've never understood what it is about the graduate school environment that is so hostile toward people's personal lives, and that insists, "Your life is in the department, not out there." Now, my life has been one where, after developing that mode of thinking that is inculcated in most of us at MIT, it is unlikely that I would have a successful marriage except with somebody like my wife, who is also



an academic. We all kind of plunge into the academic circle. All we do is spend late hours reading and doing research on the computer and all that. The average, everyday person is not going to be able to do that.

The question is, is there something that's generic about graduate students or something that's specific about the African-American experience? I'm not trying to make a case for the fact that this is unique to blacks. I'm just saying that's something that comes to mind.

*I haven't heard that from any of the other people I've talked to. I've talked to about sixty people now and you're the first to mention that that clearly. And it's a problem. It's an issue. I'm very happy you mentioned that. It's an issue. There's no question about it. We ought to look at it because if there's anything we can do about that, it's our responsibility. It's an excellent point.*

It might be something about economics. About the time I was at MIT, that theory of marriage—the economic theory of marriage—was being developed, the idea of assorted mating. If you come from some country background and you bring some country girl with you and then you have the capacity to become a world-renowned star, some of the faculty members saw it almost as their responsibility to take this country bumpkin on the side and just try to explain what she's going to have to do in order to be successful. Black colleges do that, too. I've known of instances where the dean of women would go over and talk to some young lady and say, "This guy that you're about to get married to, he's going places. He's going to be a famous doctor or lawyer or something like that. Now if you want to keep up with him, you have to learn how to act, learn how to dress, and so forth." But I think it takes on a different meaning between happening at the black college, where it's actually being said as a nurturing kind of phenomenon, and the situation I'm describing at MIT, where the premise was—"Well, obviously she's backwards and there's nothing you can do in order to elevate her standards."

Maybe MIT preferred to have people who weren't married. It's just like my wife's experience at Carnegie Mellon. I think they would have preferred that all the graduate students be unmarried; then you get married after you get tenure. You can talk to my wife to see what she thinks about all this, but I'll tell you, when she had the first baby, a

lot of people came and said, "Are you going to give up your academic career?" Then when she had a second baby, people said, "You're crazy, you're crazy. How are you going to live a life like this? Taking care of babies at the same time you're ..." In fact, when she was at Carnegie-Mellon, one of her dissertation advisors said, "If you're married to a professor, you don't really need a Ph.D."

I don't know why you haven't heard more people talk about that. I've looked at the statistics on faculty and there's far, far fewer married women—married black women—among Ph.D's than there are among black women in general. There's got to be a reason. Men, they're married and they're divorced, but a lot of women out there have had experiences that are quite different. It's kind of hard to go through the MIT experience and be a woman and also be married. I'm sure you've talked to enough women in order to find out about that, but I hope that you will explore that a little more deeply—whether or not family and marriage are incompatible with the nature of the MIT experience, except in those instances where they are both graduate students.