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I was born in a little town called Dillon, South Carolina, right on the North Carolina border in Dillon County. That was December 11, 1947. I was the fifth child at that time. I have a brother who is younger than I am. He is the sixth child. I had three sisters older, one brother older, and the younger brother. The family was very close in the sense that it was almost like two families. My older brother and sisters were in high school. They graduated high school before I even entered. My mother had four children and then there was a gap. Actually, there was a while between myself and my next older sister, so my younger brother and I were sort of raised as two children since we were younger than the others. But we all lived together.

I suppose the immediate family and the extended family all stressed education. My older siblings had all done very well in school—not only my older siblings, but my cousins as well. It was just expected that if you were a Manning, then you were going to do well in school. And that happened.

I remember the first day I learned how to read. It was rather uneventful. My mother was around the house. I must have been about three or four years old, and she just said, “I think I’ll teach you how to read.” She took a yellow pad and pencil and we had a lesson. She taught me how to read and write in that one lesson. There was never any great struggle in that regard. So when I went to school, I was reading, writing, calculating, and so forth.

You mean when you were in the first grade?

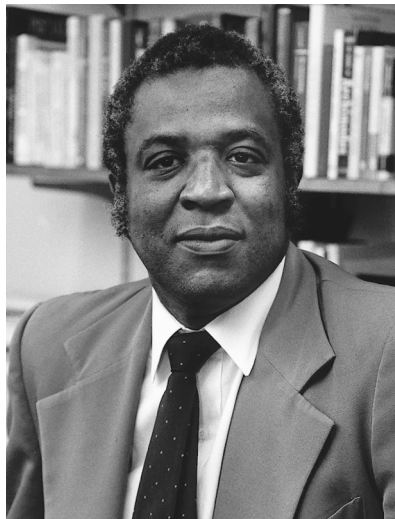
Edited and excerpted from oral history interviews conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Kenneth R. Manning in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 30 May 1996 and 13 September 1998.

First grade, yes. I don’t know. It just happened. It’s just natural. And from there through high school I never had any difficulty with school work. It was just something I could sit there and do. It could be math, science, reading.

How was your school in terms of the number of students?
Thirty students per class. We went from first grade through twelfth grade, thirty students per class. You knew them all. There was no great influx into the community. Maybe once in a while the odd child would come from some other district to school, but there were thirty students per class.

These were all black kids?
These were all black kids, yes.

Describe how you were thought of, as far as the teacher was concerned, in that cohort of students.



I think I probably was at the top of the class, but I had classmates who were very good and were seen as good students. We were lucky. We had a series of teachers who had gone away and taken master's degrees at places like Columbia, Indiana, and so forth. These were very committed people. Subsequently, some of them got doctorates and so forth. Now why that should have happened in that little town, I do not know. Sometimes people just get located in a place by accident or by the fact that they grew up there, but there were these real pockets of excellence in the faculty at the school. That was enough to carry you through. It was a different time. There were no problems of discipline. I mean, you did well and you behaved yourself. There was no question about it.

What years are we talking about?

I must have entered school in '55, '56, something like that. That's critical, because from that moment I can remember we were always told that there would be integration in the schools, and that we had to be not as good as, but better than, the whites. I mark that date because the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was in '54, and nothing changed in terms of the segregation or desegregation of the schools in South Carolina in general, and certainly Dillon at that time. But the court's decision was made and people were anticipating integration. They saw the need for excellence in order to compete. That was stressed from the day I was in first grade, and that was happening. In fact, the Supreme Court decision was like a mandate for them to really prepare this generation of students.

When you look back at that time, do you recall how you spent your time outside the classroom?

I did a lot of things. I did chores. I would often-times write letters for older people in the neighborhood, some with relatives who lived long distances away. I was always put in the position of interpreting materials that they may have gotten in an official bureaucratic way—negotiating, paying bills, walking downtown to pay their bills, that kind of community work. As I look back on it, taking responsibility.

How small was your town?

About five thousand, three to five thousand.

And about how many would you say were black?

Oh, about half.

So everybody knew everybody pretty much?

Oh, yes. Everybody knew everybody. Where are you from?

Goldsboro.

It's a little smaller than Goldsboro.

Goldsboro was about forty or fifty thousand people, I'd say about forty-five thousand. A lot of that was the Air Force base.

Was that a big force at that time?

Pretty big.

Dillon is smaller than Goldsboro. What was interesting about the town was that it's on—well, there was no 95 at that time, it was 301—the main road to Florida. It was right at a place called South of the Border, so the town got a lot of attention from tourists.

Do you recall how you went about selecting what kind of college education you would pursue?

In high school, I went to two summer programs—well, one summer program for two years in Knoxville, Tennessee. It was called Summer Study Skills Program. It was funded by a Presbyterian group. I forget what it was called. I should know it. I was going to say United Presbyterian, but that's not the one.

Anyway, a man named Samuel Johnson—you might have known him; he lives in Atlanta, a huge guy—was director of this program. Sam knew my guidance counselor, Ruby Carter. People went throughout the Southeast trying to identify talented minorities. Sam was black. He would also go to the Southwest and identify American Indians. Over the summer, he would get about thirty students from all over the South—Atlanta, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Mississippi, and so forth. These were probably the best students in the state. He convened us at Knoxville College, and we had an intensive six-week summer session.

Mr. Parker, whom I absolutely adored and who is deceased now, was the mathematics teacher. He graduated from Amherst in 1916. He had gotten his master's degree from Harvard and taught in public schools pretty much all his life. For a short time he taught at West Virginia State, but most of the time he taught in public schools—an extraordinarily brilliant and gifted man.

There were other people. There was a woman from the Merrill Palmer Institute that used to be in Detroit or Chicago, I don't remember. She did

psychological testing. Then there was Jim Comer, the famed black psychoanalyst at the Yale Child Study Center. He used to come down. He was supposed to be studying these—I wouldn't say geniuses, but gifted students.

It was odd, like being in the military. You got up every morning at 5:30. Then someone was designated to sound some kind of taps or alarm, and from that time until about eleven at night, every moment of your day was taken. The program stressed mathematics and reading. We had to do a lot of writing—writing and reading. It was really quite good to come together with other African-Americans who were extraordinarily gifted, especially people who had had better high schools than I had. That was good because it immediately then established a pecking order. You were placed in a group. There was Alpha, Beta, Omega, and something. Alpha was the top group. These were ability groupings. There was no question. I mean, the lowest group was expected to do as well as the highest group. They grouped people according to ability—"A" being the top group. The minute you stepped on campus in early June, there was a test that was given. Mr. Parker was so influential that his score on the math determined pretty much where you would be placed.

I talked with my parents—should I go to summer school? I was really used to working during the summer for money, but it was decided that the program was good and I wanted to go. It was good because pretty much the cost was something that was defrayed by the Summer Study Skills Group. I don't think you had to pay anything.

I took a bus from Dillon to Knoxville, Tennessee. I read the program and I thought I was supposed to get there no earlier than noon on the Saturday that I was scheduled. So I had a bus—an overnight bus—that got me into Knoxville at about eleven o'clock. I said, from eleven o'clock to twelve I could take a taxi and get there. It was so funny because these plans were so precise. But as I got on that bus in North Carolina, the bus had a flat tire. It took the bus driver three hours to get it into place, so I got into Knoxville after noon and rushed over in a taxi.

Of course, the whole school had already taken their tests. It was basically run like the military, so apparently the faculty had to meet particularly with this student who had gotten down there late. Everybody else had gotten their tests

back. I am told many years later that Mr. Parker piped up and said, "Send him home, send him back." But anyway, Sam Johnson intervened and they decided they would keep me there, but I had to spend that Sunday morning—while everyone else was in church—taking my tests. It must have worked to my advantage because I was put in the top section.

I would have expected it, but the kids from Atlanta were so uppity. They were just insufferable, absolutely insufferable. Then you had these kids from New Orleans, and this one had been to Europe—it was just gross. It was the first time I had really run into the black bourgeoisie in that way. It was just too much. But the good thing about the program was that they couldn't bring any of their fine clothes. It was strict. They told you exactly what you could wear. You had to wear jeans. There was no dressing up in this place.

So we got started. Mr. Parker was extraordinary, but every time he would give a test—and he gave a test every day—I'd make a hundred. He was the one who separated people. At the end of the week, every Friday, you would have this big gathering at six o'clock in the evening and you would get your report card. There were two categories, actually three. There were people who did okay, but then there were people who made what they called the Dean's List. These were people who got A's and B's only. Those people were taken out to dinner on Sunday at a fine restaurant. If you got a D in any instance, you had to go to what was called "the doghouse"—the library—on Sunday while the others were free to rest.

They were on punishment.

They announced it. All of us would gather around. You might have five or six people who would go out to dinner.

Out of thirty-something?

At the most. He said he would take you out if it was only one person, and then you had a significant number of people who had to go to the doghouse. There was no question about it. I mean, there was competition; it was clear, it was explicit, there was no question about it. I went there two years. I made the Dean's List every time.

It was very unusual, extraordinary. But it was what I liked. It was discipline. It wasn't that I had to be that smart—except for the math, you really didn't have to be smart. But in the other areas you

had to do your work, follow instructions. They were preparing you for college. I had good preparation in high school, but there's nothing like the competitive atmosphere that was needed. Mr. Parker gave you timed tests. I mean, he would come in—he said anybody could work a problem if they got a chance to take it home and mull over it, but he wanted to know what you could do on the spot. You would be taking the test and he'd say, "Take your time, you've got another minute," and everybody would just tense up, fumble. You'd get down to fifteen seconds and he'd start counting down—"fifteen, fourteen, thirteen." If you can take that kind of pressure, you're doing well. He did not allow excuses or anything. You didn't dare go into the classroom not having done the homework.

This was the summer of your junior year?

At first it was my sophomore year and then my junior year. As I said, every week we would have people from the country come in. Part of that program had a guy named McCarthy who was at that time the head of ABC, A Better Chance. We had a resident guidance counselor who had come from the Merrill Palmer Institute who was very up on all the colleges and just had connections with all college and admissions people throughout the country. Part of our day was geared toward looking at the curriculum, going through American colleges and universities to try to see which ones you thought you might want to go to and what the curriculum was like, what the faculty was like.

So we had extensive training in filling out applications and financial aid forms. I did not approach the system naively. You might try to restrict yourself to schools you think you can afford, but you were told right away about the whole notion of need-based admissions. If you got in, schools of a certain caliber will tend to make it possible for you to go—therefore, you really should pursue them. The financial considerations were not important. That's the way I approached college. I did all my applications myself. There was no financial concern. We were taught all this. It was very, very good, an excellent program.

I should call Jim Comer and see what kind of data he has from that program. He had to come down, as I said, two or three times because he wanted to make certain people were psychologically okay. It was a very intense group of talented

people, so it had to be run just right and every problem had to be attended to right away. There could be no deviation. Behavior had to be absolutely impeccable.

What a good idea, bringing a talented group of people, young men and women from all over the South.

Yes. We shared the same dormitory, that was another thing that was interesting. The faculty and students all lived in the same dormitory. You had certain space that you were restricted to, so it had to be regimented in that way. There was no other way.

There were women in that group?

Yes. They were all in the same dormitory.

Do you know any of them?

Many went to Ivy League schools. I know them all now. There was Francesca Farmer. There was a guy who went here. What was his name, Marvin Henderson? When I went to Harvard he came here as an undergraduate student. Most of the kids went to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and so forth. The program was finally dismantled. It was a casualty of the political revolution of the '60s. What happened was, this was the time of Upward Bound and people's attention and the focus was more on people who were at the bottom half of the academic sector than those who were at the top. People accused the program of being elitist, of having elitist goals and demands. They used the Black Power threats of the late '60s as a reason to stop supporting it. Sam was convinced that it was because it was successful and people were saying that this kind of discipline wasn't right, that we should be more loving and caring. They were sympathizing with the "black underclass" and our program didn't do that. You had to get up and you had to perform, and that was it.

That's what all of us needed.

You had to do it and if you didn't do it, you could go home.

So essentially, there were others who actually went two summers as well?

Pretty much. I think half from the first group went two summers. You went the second summer only if you were sort of exceptional, because then you could serve as a mentor for the people who were there for the first time. It was my class that was the first one to be given the opportunity to go two summers.

That had to have a tremendous impact on your future life and your career.

As I said, in South Carolina my abilities were known and they weren't being challenged. What it did do was it gave me a sense of national exposure.

I can tell you this story. When I was taking algebra, we were the first class that had algebra taught over television. Television was a good way of trying to expose all students in the state to the same material. Otherwise, you would get some schools not getting beyond page 25. Anyway, we took this test and at the end it was sort of like an achievement test. It was in algebra. All the students in my school, which was an all-black school, took the test. They sent the test to Columbia and the test came back. The scores were divided into "Negro" and "white." I saw this very, very distressed look on my teacher's face and I didn't know what was going on. He was looking up scores of people in our class and, anyway, he had my score and he couldn't find my score on the scale. It was very, very funny. Then after he realized what had happened, he was so pleased about my having gone off scale. The reason they segregated these scores was to try to show how the blacks were lower than the whites.

I thought that was funny. That gave me a boost. The whole question of race just dropped right out. That was just gone. You see, I needed that in that sense because if you're not given an opportunity to compete, then you can always think you are not as good. I see how the baseball teams in the old Colored League felt, and why they wanted to be in the mainstream—not because they wanted to be around white people, but because it settles the question. Right now, you really wouldn't know. And it's interesting how it happens in sports. I was looking at television the other day. A white basketball team and a black basketball team met in the segregated South at Duke. They weren't supposed to meet, but they did it on their own one weekend or something. They would go up to the gym and they'd just play together.

The same is true in academia. That's one argument for people going to the same places. We took our examination in one place and the whites took theirs in another; the examinations came back, and I received the top mark. Actually, it was good that the examination was segregated because I could clearly see that I had beaten them. That was in the ninth grade, eighth to ninth

grade. I never had any problem with segregation or math.

Did your other peers know that had happened?

Oh, yes. After the teacher finally realized what had happened, he said, "I can't find your score."

So when you went to this summer school, there were people there who knew?

Dealing with the whites was no problem because I knew I could beat them. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that I had not come across just these really supercilious bourgeois black people. Where did they come out of? Left field somewhere. What that summer school did, it really sort of showed me what that group was about. It gave me an opportunity to deal with them.

You filled out all these applications. Did you apply to more than Harvard?

I applied to Harvard, Yale, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, Duke, Wesleyan, and Davidson.

In North Carolina?

In North Carolina. Davidson claimed to have lost my application. Oh, I should get that letter. I'm going to find that letter.

You got a letter where they said that?

Yes. I still have that letter. It was a lie, but they didn't want to deal with the race issue. I wish I could get that letter. I know I've got it. It's at home somewhere. I'll find it. Duke accepted me. All of them accepted me.

The point of Duke is an important one because this was when?

1965.

1965. And you have to know what that meant that in 1965 you got admitted to Duke. It's a major, major thing for a black person. There were virtually no blacks there at that time, except basketball players, and only one or two of them. So you were accepted to all of them.

Yes.

How did you make your decision?

I wanted to go to Wesleyan. I had lived in North Haven. I didn't finish high school in South Carolina. I went through to the eleventh grade and I had taken all of the courses that I could take at that time. There were no more. I had a choice of either finishing up a year at Andover, which I did not want to do because I did not really want to go into a boarding school situation at that time, or

there was the opportunity of living—almost like an exchange, except there was no exchange—with a family in North Haven. I chose to do the latter.

I ended up staying with the family and playing squash at Yale and for my high school in North Haven. I finished school there. That year was very interesting. I took the courses that this school had to offer. They had done some interesting things in math. They had committed themselves to something that's called SMSG math, which was the new kind of math at the time. I took English courses, concentrating more on modern literature than the classics. It was an opportunity to get some feel for the Ivy League. When I went up for my senior year, I had already applied over that summer, made all of my college applications, so it was just a question of where. All of my references were written by teachers in Dillon, South Carolina.

Your parents had to be very, very supportive and very much at ease about allowing you to come north.

Well, in part it was that, but in part it was because of my guidance counselor, in part it was Sam Johnson. I had done well in his summer school. My parents had come out. They had a little graduation after the summer session, and all the parents would come down. By this time I had gone to national science fairs and won things. By this time, I'd been out there in the nation.

Is it fair to say that with these very influential people, they saw you really as one of their major stars?

I don't know that. I didn't see it. For Mr. Parker, that was probably the case. There were all these kids. All these people right now are major people throughout the country. There's Winifred White, Mr. Parker's granddaughter, who's this big thing at NBC out in LA. There are judges, you know, people like that whom I knew in high school. I wasn't unique. I probably just academically was near the top, if not the top. I hear about some of the people. These were all A students. I will allow you to say that I was one of them, but not the only one.

Did many of them do what you did in terms of leaving your home and coming to another part of the country to finish their senior year?

Some of them after that first summer went straight to Exeter. One thing I resisted was that the program used to try to push prep schools on you very strongly. They pushed Exeter, Andover, Choate, Mount Hermon. I remember a guy who was a Hispanic from Taos, New Mexico. He was a

Mormon. He went to a prep school. It was good for them. I just had a strong enough family that I wanted not to do that, but it didn't make sense for me to just go to high school in Dillon in the twelfth grade when there was no course that I hadn't taken. That just didn't make any sense. And I did not want to begin college.

But you could have, though?

I could have entered college. Well, the only place I could have gone to college was Morehouse because most places require you to have four distinct years of English that you can't double up on.

You have to take that every year for four years.

That's right. And that was what I was missing.

That's the way it was in North Carolina.

I wouldn't have had the degree, but I had all the courses.

You mentioned another point that I want to ask you about, and that is about Morehouse. Obviously, you could have applied to Morehouse and certainly could have gone.

I tell this to people and get funny faces, but it was exactly what happened. I'll tell it, it's the truth. My guidance counselor was a Spelman graduate and she said there was no way she was going to allow me to apply to a black college because I would "flunk out." I do not know what she meant, but this is what she said. She's alive, you can go interview her. She said that, I did not say it. Everybody gets upset because they act as if I said it, or I'm saying something about black colleges. I don't know.

Now I think what she meant—and she did not say it, she said only what I said, I am interpreting—was that even at that time I had a very critical honesty that doesn't go over very well in certain environments. She had been in these environments and she knew. You see, I didn't know very much about black institutions. I'm learning more now, and when I wrote my book on Ernest Everett Just, than I ever knew. She knew that whole system from issues of color to all that kind of stuff. I would have been very precise in saying certain things, and her view was that that would have gone against me. Now I don't know, but that's what I think she meant.

Knowing black colleges and going through black colleges and all that, I think you have a very good interpretation of the problem.

That's why it never even crossed my mind, going to a black college.

I see. It makes sense. You chose Harvard, though.

Wesleyan was my real love. I had gone with a group of people who were extraordinary. It was just a wonderful, wonderful experience. But I had also visited Harvard. When people at Yale interviewed me, there was some affect in the people there—they were “happy” to see me. I went to Harvard and they were absolutely cold. They didn't show any emotion about me or anything. It was just dreadful. It was just what it is at Harvard.

Before making that decision, I had met a professor there—Hilary Putnam—who was very bright and I enjoyed talking with him. He was a cousin of the people with whom I was living. He never recommended anything, but I dismissed Wesleyan because Middletown was just too small. I decided that it just wasn't where I wanted to be. It was a hard thing to resist, because people were very nice. Then I saw that when I got to Harvard and started thinking about Harvard, I really wanted a place where people were honest. Somehow I just finally decided that that was where I wanted to go.

You entered Harvard as a freshman. When you think back now and you look at that first year, what do you think about? What were the highlights of that first year? What were the issues or incidents that you can recall about that first year?

The first year was just a wonderful year. A lot of the kids I had already met—a number of them in national competitions and things like that—so by the time you were a high school senior, you knew a cadre of people. I don't know what all I had done as a high school student, but I had gone on and won a prize here, a prize there, a national prize. You may bring fifteen or twenty students together in Richmond, New Orleans, St. Louis, or something. So by this time, you know certain people over the country. I had done a number of that sort of thing—science fairs and competitions.

Who put you into all these things?

I just did it myself. I don't think I did Westinghouse, but things like that.

And you won most of them too?

Well, I won enough to get in.

You remind me of when your book on Just came out. The people had to pull you into a place where now there's all

this extra work. You didn't want to do anything, but to get you to say some of these things about your achievements is really like pulling teeth.

Well, at this point it becomes natural. You just sort of go with the flow. It is nice when you come to campus and you know certain people or know about certain people. Then there were people who were asking, “Well, how did you get to Harvard?” I'd look at them and they didn't mean anything by that, and I'd say, “Well, I just took the train from Dillon up to Boston.” That would stop the conversation, because that really wasn't what they were after.

Now are you talking about non-blacks asking you this question, or were these blacks?

Non-blacks. I was amused because these students were so proud. They walked around with their chests puffed out. I just looked at them and said, “Are you surprised that you're in Harvard? Didn't you always expect that you would get to be here?” They were fuming. Essentially, all I did was write out my name and fill in my application. It never dawned on me, it really didn't. It never dawned on me for one moment that I wouldn't be accepted anywhere. In the high school, all these students tried to create this anxiety—“Did you get into this? Where did you get in?” I just could never get myself all riled up like that. I just assumed that if you do your work and recognize merit, you'll get in. Now, in retrospect that's probably not how the world works, but it worked that way for me.

Well, particularly when you look back at all the benchmarks. A couple of things you mentioned in terms of competing with a group, testing. This is not the issue anymore with this group of people you met during the summer.

Yes, you're right. It just doesn't become an issue. In my freshman year, I just went and did my work. I was in the top group. You know, at Harvard they rank you—Group I.

Explain that a little bit to me.

You are ranked. They do it Group I, Group II, Group III, Group IV at the end of the first year.

You mean on an academic basis?

Oh yes, absolutely.

Is that still being done?

I suppose it is. I don't think it has changed.

What do they base it on?

On your grades, that's what it's based on.

That's right down your line.

They continued to work at it, what they're doing. I liked that about the place. I enjoyed my time at Harvard. I'm not like people who really had a bad time. I had a great time.

What made it so great?

Well, they left you alone and they challenged you. They had real expectations, not only from the faculty but from the student body as well. You were just expected to be a leader. They say over the years these things become sort of inculcated in the faculty. To be fair now, I will be the first to admit that Harvard is not for everybody. When I was there, it was for people who were motivated, people who saw resources in the community. I like the fact that people didn't bother you and I like the fact that people appreciated excellence.

You can do work at a certain level and it's fine, it's acceptable. Or you can spend the extra amount of time to really get it on a slightly higher level. You spend a lot of time to perfect it, and a lot of the time it's just not appreciated. And there it was appreciated. People took care in the assignments that they handed in. You notice that. People struggled and that becomes a part of life. The first year was a very good year for me because there was really no transition at all to make. I took graduate courses my first year at Harvard.

You were allowed to do that?

Oh, you could do anything.

So it's wide open. You could just do whatever you wanted to do.

If you're good enough. They don't encourage it, but they don't stop it.

What about an advisor? Did you have an advising system?

You had a freshman advisor. What does he do? He signs your study card. You took courses and you worked hard. I certainly don't remember all this counseling practice. I know they had a Bureau of Study Counsel, which was an academic unit. If you needed remedial help in whatever it was—it could be Spanish, it could be reading, it could be writing—you'd go there and that was very short-term. You were not to go there and stay. It was assumed that you were prepared, and if you were not prepared, it was too bad.

Were there any issues around, say, the lives of you and the black students that you can recall?

I didn't have those problems. I knew I was black, but I did not have to go around telling people that I was black and that I was oppressed. I knew I was oppressed. I did not have to make these declarations. This was a political time. This was 1966 to '70, probably the foremost political years in the history of American education. So people were concerned. They were concerned with the war. They were concerned with civil rights. They were concerned with Kent State, with Cambodia. Every year there was a potential shutdown. This was exciting. People talked politics. They had passion about their beliefs. A lot of the discussion was on race and political issues. There was kind of an intense identity-seeking on the part of many blacks, especially blacks who found themselves at white colleges and had lived a rather privileged life. Who would join Afro-Am, the black group? Those became real issues.

My purpose of being at college, although I had sympathy for these things, was to be the best I could. I told the blacks and I told the whites, "You people have family businesses you can go back to after you finish these demonstrations and get your jail sentence and get thrown out of school. I don't have a family business to go back to. You can go on, you can take on all the forces you want, you can get kicked out—I am not doing it casually." And I was clear about that. Even though I was on scholarship, my parents paid some money. There were sacrifices being made by my family and others. I didn't need a frivolous identity boost. I just didn't need it. I grew up among blacks, I love black people, I had no problems. My skin color is not such that I can pass, so I did not need to be affirmed who I was.

Could you think about influential people during your undergraduate education at Harvard? You had to come across so many scholars, very outstanding people. Were there any people who really influenced you, particularly in regard to what you finally settled on in terms of your career?

What influenced me most, I think, was that I had to get a job. When I got to Harvard—I had to come early—the first and only job that I ever had was in the library, shelving books in Widener. This is where the scholars were. Not even many undergraduates were admitted to the library. That

ambiance, in the light of scholarly people who would stay there until the library closed, made me realize that this is what I wanted to do. That came more from the atmosphere. Knowing that you could find anything you wanted to there gave me the inspiration.

Oh, there were professorial performances in literature classes, math classes, and history classes. These were people who were internationally known. It was nice to have people like that who really polished their lectures, but it was really more just the scholarly aspect of the experience.

I assume you saw a lot of all kinds of very outstanding people in and out of that library.

Not only at Harvard, but all around the world—just the whole idea that there are questions we can begin to understand through research and analysis. There were questions I couldn't give the answers to just through simple research, but they were very fascinating.

That's how you really established what you wanted to do.

Yes.

Looking beyond your first year, when you look back at your whole career at Harvard and the undergraduate program that you went through, is there anything you can think of as important highlights academically, socially, or whatever?

I was about to tell you about sophomore year. I overloaded myself and after being sort of very cocky from the first year, I hadn't done so well in the first semester of sophomore year. I went through the first semester and I remember the transcript, and my mother telling me that I should drop my job and that she would make up the money. It drove home to me the need to be careful and not to slack off, which one can do very easily. I knew other people were watching. You see, what happens is if you consistently get good grades, people don't notice you.

They take it for granted.

Yes, they take it for granted. I did a thesis.

What was that on?

Imaginary numbers. I was in the history of mathematics. I took science courses, math courses, history courses, literature courses. It was a remarkable experience. In fact, when I graduated, they had a contest of the students. The senior class was asked—each student—to nominate a teacher who

had the most influence on him in high school. We had to write up a supporting letter. I nominated Mr. Parker, and he won. What Harvard did for him was pay for an all-expense trip to graduation and award three or four thousand dollars, a lot of money in those days.

Anyway, there was something very striking that happened. The university had been closed since early May. It was 1970. I was upset. It may have been Kent State. I had decided that I wasn't going to participate in my graduation. Harvard was part of "the establishment," and I was very distressed. I found out that Mr. Parker had won, but I had left to go home. Now, I knew I was going to be in graduate school, I just had no reason to stay for graduation. Anyway, somehow Mr. Parker called and got me at home about midnight one night. I did not realize that my decision might be affecting others. Mr. Parker was very, very hurt. He stressed that he was going, and he was going because I had nominated him. He began talking about the world. Then he made some remark—very, very poignant. He said scholars work hard and lead lonely lives. The public at large does not know what scholars do. There's only one time when town-and-gown gets a chance to come together, where scholars can trot out their wares and show them to the public. He was so convincing, I just felt terrible for having been so selfish.

At the last minute, I went. It was a very special moment. I never understood graduations until that time. Now I see that there is that ritual. What we as scholars do is rare, it's isolated, it isn't seen a lot by the outside world—and then there is our little moment in the sun.

I have never thought about it that way. Boy, he was quite a person.

He was quite a person. It's because of that that two years later Amherst offered him an honorary doctorate, because he was the Harvard University Teacher of the Year. This award got reported in the Amherst alumni magazine.

Your class selected him based on your letter?

Yes.

This teacher who had been the most influential?

Yes.

Do you have that statement?

I'm sure. You see, Harvard keeps everything. It's in the Harvard Archives. Now, how did they judge

that? I don't know. They have a committee. I know Archie Epps was part of it.

He was dean of students at that time?

No, he was one member of the committee.

So I was very happy about that. Mr. Parker came to graduation. He also came to my doctoral graduation. It's funny. He offered to because his granddaughter, Winifred, was graduating also from Radcliffe at that time. After the morning ceremonies in Harvard Yard, you go to the various schools. The Law School would go back to the Law School. Anyway, I was getting my degree in Dunster House, since I was a tutor there. I think Winifred was in Quincy House. He neglected hers and went to mine. That was fun.

Are you talking about paying him back?

You see, that's why I understood. It didn't take me a minute to understand what that was all about.

It was moving on. It's a bond you can't explain, but it just happens.

That's right.

It started in the summer programs you had.

That's right. The reason I liked him is he was a hard teacher, college-level. He hated textbooks. All of his problems he made up himself. That's what you need.

You said you had already decided that you were going to go to graduate school before you came back for your senior year.

Well, I had done work at Harvard during the summers. I had done research in the library, research in the history of science. I just knew that's what I was going to do.

At least, you did; it made sense to you.

I had published papers as an undergraduate. My first paper was a history of extraneous solutions that I submitted to a journal. I don't know whether I was a sophomore or junior, but it was accepted. I could never forget the joy of that first publication.

Did somebody suggest you do that?

No. I read journals and I saw my research was as good as anyone's.

You were well on your way before you got out of undergraduate school.

I got a Ford Doctoral Fellowship afterwards. Graduate school was interesting. I had done most

of the graduate courses as an undergraduate, so I really didn't have much coursework to do. After the first year, which was unheard of, I took my generals.

You are too much.

I told you as an undergraduate that I had taken graduate courses. I enjoyed taking undergraduate courses, but I also enjoyed taking graduate courses. That gave me a heightened sense of research and what it was about, what it was really about. So I took many graduate courses. As a first-year graduate student, I hadn't taken the required methods seminar, so I took that. That was essentially all I hadn't taken. The only thing I could take would be reading courses. So I took my generals after one year. I took my language exams between being a senior in college and a first-year graduate student.

What languages?

German and French. I decided I was going to get them out of the way because I didn't want to have to bother with them. Other graduate students were coming in from other places for the first year and I had already finished these requirements. So after the first year, I finished my generals.

All this time I had done some tutoring in the community—black kids, helping with math. The first person I met in Cambridge in 1966 was Vivian Johnson. She was teaching. She was over a little program down in Putnam Square. I went over and met her. Anyway, I did that throughout undergraduate school. I actually taught school in Roxbury at a school called Highland Park. It was one of those free schools. If I had a seminar in the afternoon, I'd go teach early in the morning. It was a way of reconnecting with the community. It was a way of really giving good service. I had the time, but then I realized I probably should write my thesis.

So then I wrote my thesis and finished graduate school in four years. That was record time. Most people, at least in the history of science at Harvard, would take six, seven, sometimes eight years to finish. I just didn't want to be in that position. I just decided to get on with my dissertation.

Were there any influential people during that stretch of your education at Harvard?

Well, they were all influential. I took my generals and on my generals committee was Hilary Putnam, the person whom I knew before coming to college. There was Dirk Struik. He was a math-

emetician at MIT who was very famous in his own right, and a very fine man. Then there was I. Bernard Cohen. I was determined to have a strong group of people or adjudicators in my area.

In that period of time, were there any other black scholars whom you made contact with while you were still in graduate mode?

Did you know a guy named Ephraim Isaac? He was an Ethiopian who was at Harvard. The Afro-Am department was having all kinds of troubles. He was there and had begun leading in the field of Afro-American studies. I knew people like Nell Painter, Arnold Rampersad, just people who were around. There weren't many black scholars. We were all sort of novelties.

What about outside Harvard? Were there any black scholars in your field?

Not in my field at all, and not that I communicated with.

What about the other black folks who were at college at that time? Who stands out?

The one person whom I knew I wasn't going to be like was Martin Kilson.

He did a lot of writing during that time.

He did a lot of writing and it's probably correct, but at the time he had a way of attacking black students. I didn't like a lot of things that he was saying. I didn't like what he said and I didn't like the way he said it.

So four years after you got your undergraduate degree, you were marching for your Ph.D. Once you got your Ph.D., what did you do then?

Well, it's very interesting. I was a tutor in Dunster House at the time. I'm going to try to remember this as clearly as I can. I jumped into my car one day, saying, "I'm the best, I'm good, MIT should have someone in my field. I don't know whether they do or not, but they should." I didn't know a thing about MIT. I had come down here once or twice to meet Dirk, who had an office down in Building 2.

Anyway, I drove and I think I came right in this door, I'm trying to remember. Your office and Mary Rowe's office used to be near each other, right around here. I want to get it straight, now. No, first I went over to Building 20 and walked in. Kathleen Fox was there. She was Harold Hanham's secretary. I said, "I want to apply for a position in the history of science. MIT teaches science and

technology; don't you want someone who does the history of science?" It was just a shot in the dark, as far as I was concerned. I wasn't pursuing any lead that I had encountered. And Kathleen said, "Oh, Nathan Sivin is handling the applications." I didn't even know there was a position, so I said, "What?" Anyway, she said, "You ought to talk to Nathan Sivin."

What happened was that I spoke with Nathan and other people. I think Leon Trilling may have been on that search committee. I know Irving Kaplan was. They were starting up a little group called Technology Studies and they were having people give talks. This was in May of '74. Because they were just getting started, I suppose in some sense I had an advantage. I never remember submitting any kind of resumé or anything like that. It was a rather informal way of just being hired. There was no departmental program as such in a rigorous sense.

But I didn't hear anything, so I thought maybe I should make sure they were not discriminating against me. I didn't know anything about what I was doing. Somehow I got shown Mary's office. I can never forget this. I remember she said, "I don't know whether I should handle this or whether Clarence should handle it." Now there wasn't anything to handle, but I remember that because I didn't know who this person was, I didn't know what the division of labor was. She had brought this up. I mean, I couldn't tell her whether she could handle it. I didn't know what was being referred to, but that was what she said.

There was nothing else that happened, except that I got the job very quickly. I don't think I ever submitted a resumé or anything like that. That's how I got the job at MIT. I just walked right off the street and said, "You need to hire somebody and here I am." That was exactly how I got my job.

My first teaching assignment was in ESG. I remember Harry saying, "Oh, I think it's important for you to learn the Institute, and ESG would be a quick way to learn about MIT students and so forth." In retrospect, that was real wisdom on his part to suggest that. I remember over the summer coming down to MIT, July 1, going into ESG and getting to know people, thinking about what the humanities offerings would be in the fall term and so forth. So it was a rather unusual entry into a job, no response to a job offer. There had been a job opening there, but I didn't know about it. I wasn't

applying in that way because I'm sure the deadline had long come and gone.

So you actually were somewhat surprised that things developed the way they did.

Well, I expected to get a job. I just expected that once they saw me they would give me a job. That wasn't the issue, but I didn't know there had been a job. I expected them just to create a job. I didn't know that there was actually a job, a series of jobs, that had been advertised. I was finishing up my dissertation at Harvard and I had not had the time to look around for the various positions. In fact, there had been sort of an agreement in the history of science department at Harvard that these jobs would be posted. But, for some reason, this particular job at MIT had not been posted. There were faculty members at Harvard who had had their own candidates who they wanted to have this job. I just didn't know about it and, as I said, since I was busy finishing up my dissertation, my mind was focused elsewhere. It was just by chance that I decided to jump in my car and come down to MIT, where I had never really spent any time, and just tell them that they ought to be doing the history of science with me as a person doing it.

So in a way, you were interested in MIT.

At that point, I was interested in getting a job. MIT was here, MIT was a place that I had known about. One of my dissertation advisors, Dirk Struik, was a professor of mathematics here, so I had come down occasionally to meet with him about my dissertation. But I didn't know anything else about MIT.

Let's talk a little bit about your early impressions of the MIT environment and particularly with regards to race relations and racial composition of the campus.

Well, one of the first people I met here was Frank Jones. In fact, before I decided to take a position here, there was a luncheon arranged between Frank and myself. It was arranged by the people who were hiring me. I remember Nathan Sivin, Frank, and myself went out to the Faculty Club. I had known Frank in another context vaguely. Frank loves to say that at this lunch I specifically asked him whether there was dual currency at MIT, meaning whether I thought there were different standards for blacks and for whites, and if I had any indication that there were different standards, I was going somewhere else. This is what Frank tells in retrospect, how emphatic I was about

there being only one standard of judgment. I remember the conversation. I don't remember it as starkly as Frank remembers it.

I immediately, as I said, worked in ESG and race just wasn't a real issue on my mind at that time. The program I was in was very amorphous, so I didn't have other colleagues in a comparable position where I could make comparisons. But I do remember some colleagues in the humanities. I remember Monroe Little, for example. I remember Wilburn Williams, people like that who were beginning their careers. I had been here a while by that time. I suppose I had a good environment. Nathan was very supportive. There was Harry, who was extremely supportive. Right away I started work and it wasn't long before I was on Institute committees. The issue of race within MIT wasn't something that I as an aspiring professional was confronted with that much in the early stages.

You're one of the really long-term faculty members here who happen to be African-American. Could you outline what you have liked best about the Institute and what you have liked least about MIT's effort to increase the black presence on campus, the employment environment, and so forth?

That question requires an answer in many different ways, first as a faculty member and then I'll talk about the student situation. As a faculty member, what I liked most was really the looseness of MIT, the informality, and the entrepreneurial spirit. I know that's a word that's used perhaps too much, but there is an entrepreneurial spirit that I just love. Nobody told me what to do. I was left to construct my own career path and program, and this I enjoyed doing. People have always been extremely helpful in terms of support, in terms of letting me define what it was that I wanted to do at any given time in terms of my own scholarship. Those things were very appreciated. Also, there is something else that is very positive about the community, and that is, it's a community that really values hard work. That was very good for me because I enjoyed working hard. It was good to have that reinforced in the community.

Those things were extremely positive. I can't imagine that my career could have flourished better any other place. It was and still is a very exciting place for me to do my work. I think in the MIT mode, so I have nothing but praise in that regard. I'm being just honest with you and you

know I'm a very critical person. I have nothing but praise for that. MIT is a place that in many ways isn't a very sophisticated place. Naive is perhaps too strong a word, but it sort of takes things at face value. People don't play games and there isn't this sort of sophisticated edge. As I said, I like that a lot. Now, its lack of sophistication oftentimes can get it into trouble, too, in terms of how to handle events and so forth.

Things that might have happened to me throughout my career, a lot of them would have happened to whites in the same way. I never saw things in terms of race. That's not to say that there were not racial situations as they relate to African-American faculty. I certainly saw colleagues who were asked to leave. One might have suspected that there were undercurrents of racial attitudes affecting some of the decisions, but it was very difficult to see that as the only and primary motive. Within a community like this, there have just been so many other factors that are out there.

Are you saying that in this kind of environment the chances of race being a primary factor in not being successful as a faculty member, is probably not the case?

I think that's probably not the case. That doesn't mean that it can't be a factor and it doesn't mean that it can't be determinative, but it would be very difficult for that to be. Usually, there are other things before you get to race. I think this is true in academia in general, but, particularly here at MIT, the environment has so many other factors going into making it up that it's difficult to isolate race in any one way.

Now, that's not to diminish the effect of race. As you become a faculty member who's promoted from an assistant professor, junior faculty to senior faculty, you begin to sit in on decisions and you get a broader perspective of what goes on, of what might motivate people. There are times when you may see racial elements emerge and you try and deal with them, but they always get transformed into other things and they appear in many different ways. It's a very difficult and almost elusive aspect of professional life at a place like MIT.

You were about to say something about the student category.

There were student support systems at MIT, like OME and Interphase, that existed before I came. They were here then. I was never intimately connected with them. I never knew the ins and outs,

during the early stages of my understanding about what the Admissions Office was doing. I wouldn't be in a position to say what was going on, what was the effectiveness of an office like OME. I don't know. When I became chairman of CUAFA, I had an opportunity then to look more closely at admissions and try and determine what was going on. I never had any direct authority over Interphase and so on, but there clearly was an attempt on the part of the Admissions Office and certainly during my tenure to be sensitive to bringing in minority students and to try and make certain that the ones they brought in were ones who were going to do well in this environment—not just survive, but actually do well. There was a range of opinion about just how to do this and sometimes there would be a huge amount of discussion about whether a particular procedure was helpful, harmful, or neutral. Out of all that discussion, I think people's intents were good.

Within the student body itself, if you look back over the history, you will see a number of incidents that occurred. I remember those. Those were very painful incidents, but you wonder if you're dealing with a group of students who are just very naive. I see this in a lot of instances—not just around race, but around a hundred other things. That doesn't condone it, but you do have students who come from backgrounds where sometimes they're not as sophisticated as they might be and they just don't understand a lot of cultural and social norms. This actually leads to some very interesting kinds of decisions being made. And it's not only the students. The administration shares some of the same characteristics as well.

Talk about the role you played in essentially leading the institution by being the chairperson of the committee, CUAFA.

I was on CUAFA, yes. That was a very interesting sort of service. I was on there, I think, about six years in different capacities. I was chairman for a good deal of that time. It was a very critical time because there were issues about the qualifications of minority students and their place at the Institute. One had to be certain that one wasn't admitting people who weren't qualified to do the work, because you could do as much harm engaging in that kind of endeavor as not. One had a fine line to toe in the sense that one wanted to increase

admissions, but one did not want to do that at the expense of bringing in people who could not do the work. One had to deal with the attitudes of a range of administrators and faculty about that. You didn't want people who were just so liberal that they would suspend any sense of judgment in their process of evaluating students. On the other hand, you didn't want people who brought to the table just outright prejudices about what students could and couldn't do and what they could grow to do. Throughout, it was always a process of navigating between those extremes, keeping people focused on the task, and trying to build some consensus and respect for a diverse community.

It took a lot of prodding. It took a lot of foresight, anticipation, getting people to challenge their own thinking about certain issues. I think we did a good job and, at the same time, it was good that it was happening alongside the increased women's admissions. I think people were much more willing to see women admitted. By having that willingness, some of that had to apply in the area of minority admissions as well. Those were the kinds of things that I tried to deal with.

Given that wealth of experiences you've had in this arena, there is a great deal of discussion now particularly in terms of the book that Bok and the former president of Princeton just came out with, The Shape of the River. It deals, evidently, with a lot of the things that your committee dealt with at least a decade ago. I would like to see if you can add something, based on your experiences, about this whole issue of the kind of black student from your perspective who probably has the kind of profile you think is very successful in a place like MIT. What I'm really trying to do is to get advice that you would give to the institution, based on your experiences, as to how they should begin to look at the future relative to this whole minority group.

I think students do come from different backgrounds and bring different strengths to the mix at any academic institution. I don't think there's any one way to know what these strengths are. I think you have to read the applications, you have to read between the lines. I think one thing that is constant is if you can detect willingness for hard work in an application, that's going to be very important. That probably will neutralize any deficiencies in background. There's got to be a willingness and I think you can detect that in applications. I think you probably want to be looking for some of the

same things in both minority and majority students—that is, seriousness, some demonstrated accomplishment in a range of fields, whether people have taken advantage of what was available to them. Those are the kinds of things.

Now, MIT is a little different in the sense that you have the GIRs—General Institute Requirements—that consist, in a very specific way, of math, physics, chemistry, and now some biology. Those are hurdles in some sense. Students have to pass those. But I think that diversity is important. A place like Harvard probably has resources enough to achieve the kind of diversity that it wants. The effort that goes into the admissions process there, I know, is quite extreme in terms of the reading of the folders. The back-and-forth between high school counselors and admissions people at Harvard is quite extraordinary.

MIT did a very good job as well. Usually one or two faculty members would read the folders and the staff would read them, but I do think the extent of diversity at a place like MIT is probably not as great in the sense that right away you're dealing with a select population, people who are interested in science and technology. That's going to constrain your choice. But within that constraint, I think there is considerable room to try and achieve diversity. Students must come in with a good chance of passing those General Institute Requirements. If a student did not have sufficient science and math in high school, it would be difficult. That's because, as I said, those are the sorts of requirements that you meet on arrival at MIT. Ironically, after you get past them, I think that there are diverse fields around here that you could move through and do well in. But as I said, you do have to get past them. If you're going to stay in any of the technical fields, you're going to be using those Institute requirements throughout your stay at MIT.

MIT tried to seek diversity in the student population and I felt that that was good; I don't think it really achieved that kind of diversity in the faculty. I don't think MIT is alone in this regard. I think most major universities have not had the success in the faculty ranks that they have had in the student population. If you look at American higher education, it is still a rather segregated enterprise, much different than other professions—medical profession, industry, government. Academia is very, very segregated.

What accounts for this?

I think it goes back to what I was saying about how it's very difficult to isolate race as a factor in faculty development. I feel that a career in academia is so amorphous that one can usually attribute success or failure to almost anything. As a result, it's very difficult to pinpoint when racial factors may be operative. A lot of times they are operative, but people can't get at them. As a result, you find a number of minorities not being brought into the community in an explicit way. You see this in the small number of Ph.D.'s that are given to minorities. They aren't being encouraged at an early stage. Then, even beyond that, after they get their Ph.D.'s, a lot of them aren't brought in and promoted. They find industry and other professions much more attractive because they don't want to deal with the promotion and tenure cases. These are very loose processes that are subject to many whims.

It's not that people don't take these things seriously, but it's very difficult to determine what your career is going to look like in academia. Your evaluation is performed by people who are all over the place. It might or might not come out the way it ought to come out. It's the nature of academia, I think—really not showing a clear, crisp way of going from point A to point B—that really discourages people.

There are very few outstanding black professors who can address this, except for you and a few others I know here. When you look at the success cases, and we have had some success cases—and take, say, a recent one right in your arena—what do you see that accounts for a person like that being able to be successful? Do you see anything that helps a person like that to be successful versus those who are not successful?

The case could have gone either way. It just depends on how it was constructed. It doesn't have anything to do particularly with the absolute merits of the case, and that's for almost any case. I happen to know that if something isn't done at a particular time, it can affect the promotion case. People can temporize—that is, they can not do something on time, they can develop a dossier that doesn't have the appropriate people who should be writing for a case. That's going to reflect on the case, not on the person who is assembling the case, and that's going to be part of the judgment. The discussion will say, "Well, we don't have a letter from X, Y, and Z. If we had that letter . . ." There

are just so many things like that that really can affect the case. How something looks really depends on what context it's placed in.

Tenure cases are like legal briefs. One assembles the work of a faculty member and one tries to argue its worth for tenure. One does that through the help of other reviewers, outside, nationally known people. Usually a committee is chaired by a person who begins that process. If the committee happens to be incompetent at doing that, then the strength of the case is going to be submerged in the incompetence and you aren't going to be able to see it. Or, if a committee member decides to slant the case in one way or another—and those things do happen—you aren't going to see the case. The converse is true. You could have a case that may not have as much strength, inherent strength, but one can highlight the little strength that it has in such a way that it gives the impression that it has more strength than it actually does. The people who are looking at the case from above have no way of unraveling all of that. They just don't have the time, they don't have the expertise, and they probably don't have the will.

So a lot depends on who begins the case, how it's assembled, what are the departmental needs. There's just a range of things that go into constructing a case. These cases have to have anywhere between a dozen and sixteen letters. The choice of who referees is important. There are just so many ways along the way that one can help or hinder a case.

Just to hear you explain it, it's very obvious that it's hard to pinpoint race in a situation like that as being the reason. There are so many things, as you've said before, that play into the decision.

Yes. For example, I could decide that I was going to promote Clarence. Right away, a committee is set up and I'm chairing this committee. I get your dossier. I look at what you've done, what you haven't done. I've got twelve people I'm going to decide to write. I'll let you give me two or three of your own choice. Presumably, the ones you give me are going to be the ones you know are going to write the best letters for you. Those right away have to be starred with an asterisk, so they're not going to be counted for that much.

They're biased.

They're just a filler. I could know that there are people who obviously have serious questions

about your work. Ordinarily, I want to write some of those people because I like to have a dossier that certainly has the appearance of honesty and integrity. I think, in the long run, that's going to help you more than having a dossier that has absolutely no criticism about you. This approach is going to be more plausible, more believable. It's going to be more credible. I can deal with weaknesses in a person's profile, as long as they aren't too great. If you come in with something where every word is absolutely glowing, glowing, glowing, then the other people who are going to read this aren't going to believe it. So, all of those considerations are a judgment.

Now, I don't want to give the impression that this is all political. I would just say a lot of it is in terms of how something is framed. It's certainly harder to get incompetent people promoted. That happens less than the fact that you have very competent people who could be professors at MIT who are not promoted.

Let me jump to one other subject in that arena, because I think it's helpful to get your thinking on it. Over your career, I suspect—and I know, in fact—that you have not only had close relationships with younger black professors, but also you have played a mentoring role to many of them. How did that come about, would you say? How did it evolve? I ask that only because there needs to be more of that done in the future.

I think you're giving me too much credit in some sense. The word "mentor" is a strong word. Evelyn Hammonds is a colleague whom I first met when she was a graduate student. She was a graduate student here at MIT, and she subsequently went to Harvard to do her doctoral work. She came back and she was brought into the Program in Science, Technology, and Society, the same program that I'm in. In no way can it be said that I was the one to bring her back. The department saw her value and brought her in. It was something that I obviously supported. I certainly suggested it, but there were other people who came up with the same suggestion simultaneously. So there is no way that I can take the credit away from my colleagues as well. That's a fact.

It is true that when Evelyn was here as a graduate student in physics, I did talk to her. I hope I encouraged her to go into history of science, but that's just normal talk. That's not any extra role as mentor. I've tried to maintain a fruitful, professional relationship with her while she

was a graduate student and when she came here as an assistant professor. I tried to continue that and I tried to be supportive, but she has always had her own independent, scholarly agenda. We happen to work on some of the same problems and we will talk from time to time, but in no way can I claim to be a mentor who has set out a scholarly approach or field of study that she has been following. She has defined her own problems. I have always tried to be helpful to her. If it involved criticism, I tried to give her that. If it involved praise, I've tried to give her that. I did chair the committee for her promotion and I also chaired the committee for her tenure. That is as it should have been. I've done similar things for many other people at MIT who were not minority people. I dare say she would have probably made it if I didn't chair the tenure committee, I don't know. But these things can get off track, and in her particular case I was just happy that I was there to do it. I will say that much.

You really are a diplomat, I must tell you. They taught you well in South Carolina.

I have two or three more quick questions. You may have talked about this earlier, but consider the role played by senior mentors and role models other than yourself in career development for newcomers of all races. Compare and contrast attitudes toward blacks and other groups.

Let me see. I knew Monroe Little when he was here. He was African-American and he was in the History Section. He had a very difficult time. I remember his last days here. I spent a lot of time with him. He was absolutely distressed that he had no mentorship. I could sympathize and understand what he was going through because he was in a section where that kind of support and help did not seem to be forthcoming. That was the first time that I really came to see how much that kind of support meant to people.

As I said, I really didn't need it—at least I thought I didn't need it. That may be difficult to say and I may not be being as honest as I ought to be, because it was probably always there. Harry, whom I dedicated my book to, was always someone I could talk to. I didn't see it as a mentoring role. I thought we were just friends. I'd go in, I'd talk, I'd say this, I'd say that. It was a relationship that meant a lot to me. He happened to be the dean and, in retrospect, I can see that that probably protected me in a lot of ways where I would have been unprotected had he not held that position.

I do think, especially after assuming a senior faculty position myself, that the role is an important one to look at. Academia, as I said, is this amorphous place. Sometimes the right word at the right moment to a person—it doesn't have to be much—can really point him or her in the right direction. It can save a lot of trouble. Sometimes a person isn't aware of what he or she is doing and an outside voice can make a world of difference. That is invaluable. If a person can find someone who will be truthful and tell him things he may not want to hear but needs to know, he has an invaluable person.

That does not necessarily have to be within the race. It can extend over the races. But you do need that kind of voice that is outside to look in and say, "This is what you ought to be doing. This is what's going to be beneficial for you. This will be harmful, don't do this." Just some guidance. You need people who have judgment, who are mature, who know how the place runs, and hopefully people who have some power and prestige within the community. It's not going to help you that much if your mentor is at Caltech, not within an MIT situation. It's a good thing to have that kind of mentor out there, but you need someone who's going to help you navigate through the waters here.

I like "mentor" better than I do "role model," and I'll tell you why. Mentor puts an active responsibility on the part of the person who's assuming it. That's someone who's actually going to make an effort on your part to help you advance and so forth. A role model can just be someone who's sitting up there. You want to be like this person, but that person's not doing anything to help you. There's nothing wrong with role models, but "role model" is a passive phrase, whereas a mentor for me is someone who is actively out there looking after your interests. If you can get that, then that is something good.

What would you like to say about MIT's affirmative action effort? I'm speaking specifically in your arena, which is the faculty.

Oh, I think it's ridiculous. I think it's absolutely ridiculous and I've gone on record with it. I just don't think that the faculty has any real feeling that it needs to have minorities as a part of its own. I think it doesn't value having minorities as part of the curriculum. I can just see it.

Take history, for example. African-American history is extremely important in this country. You

would think that the History Section—even if the person did not teach African-American history, but some other history—would want to have an African-American. I should think that they would want to both have a curriculum that addressed African-American issues by way of courses and so on, as well as have African-Americans. But this section has been very, very complacent about that.

Literature is another section. The record is clear. It speaks for itself. In areas where there are many, many African-Americans, our humanities area just has not taken advantage of that. That's regrettable.

I was just looking at the faculty numbers last night. In 1972 we had something like six black faculty members, I think it was. Then we went up to John Deutch's era and we had somewhere around fourteen or fifteen. We made this big pitch to develop a very excellent program in the sense that any department that identified an underrepresented minority would be given an additional slot along with thirty thousand dollars to help that person and the department to develop. That would exist as long as that person was in that department. The first year we were able to hire two underrepresented minorities and the second year we hired something like five, bringing the number up to something like maybe fifteen or sixteen. Since then, I think you know the record as well as I do. So the issue is not money.

No. The administration can affect undergraduate admissions. It can determine it. It can tell the people in the Admissions Office what MIT wants to do and the people in the Admissions Office carry it out. That's the difference between undergraduate and graduate admissions, and faculty. If you look at graduate admissions and faculty recruitment, graduate admissions is carried out more by the department than by any central office. Even though Ike Colbert, the dean for graduate education, has some role, he can't really tell the departments what to do. In faculty recruitment, the administration has even less influence. It can put money out there, but very quickly the departments find ways to circumvent the original intent of the money. The faculty doesn't necessarily have this shared view about affirmative action that the administration does.

I might say that until Vest, and I urged him to do this, wrote about affirmative action in his president's report about two years ago and gave an address at a faculty meeting, there had never been an on-the-floor discussion about affirmative action

at the faculty level. My point was that the administration cannot hope to influence faculty recruitment or affirmative action in the faculty ranks if it is not willing to take it to a forum of faculty members. You can't do it through a memo from administration to heads of the departments. That's not the way faculty issues work. My point was that affirmative action had to become a faculty issue, where the faculty would see themselves as owners of this goal. It had never been presented to them in that way.

I complained many, many times about that. Only once was this ever brought up to the faculty and I never have seen a faculty meeting where people have actually talked about what they have done in this way as a faculty issue, as an important part of the educational process. It has always been dealt with as an extra bureaucratic reporting mechanism.

That's one of the things you will continue to recommend, that you think the Institute should be about if they're going to take it seriously?

Yes. What happened is that Vest gave a very fine speech, but there was no mechanism set up for the faculty to interact among themselves about the issues. It was a speech that was given at a faculty meeting. That's a step in the right direction, but it certainly isn't as far as I envisioned.

If you were Vest at the moment and you wanted to deal with this issue—say it's 1998, and you wanted to deal with this issue—there are a lot of things that have changed in the environment, in colleges and universities as well as out in our society. But if, as the chief executive officer of this institution, you really wanted to deal with affirmative action, what would be a general kind of game plan you think you would take?

Well, first of all, you've got to make sure that the faculty shares the goals that you have. This has never happened. For instance, take the program that Mark Wrighton and John Deutch initiated. You can take money and set it aside and say, "This is for faculty recruitment," but if people don't share your goal, they're not going to do it. We've never had the discussion about whether they share the goal. I don't know whether the faculty shares that goal. The only thing I know is that some administrators say this is the goal of MIT. They have never taken the extra step and put it up to question as to whether this is an educational goal shared by the faculty; it's something that people have just sort of

assumed. From the results, you would have to conclude that they don't have that goal.

That's absolutely true, no question.

I don't know why people are afraid to ask the question and get the answer. What they do is, they just put those things forward, assume they know the answer and assume that people will act on it, but they don't act on it. They must be operating under a different set of assumptions.

What kind of advice would you give to a young black faculty member coming into a place like MIT? With your knowledge, I would also ask the same thing for a graduate student and an undergraduate student, but particularly about the faculty.

For an undergraduate student, my advice would be to work hard, to try to do very well in those GIRs, and take advantage of every aspect of MIT. There is pass/fail the freshman year. I think they should really concentrate on their studies that year, because they are under a system where they can really devote time and not be penalized for it. Learn to work independently as well as in groups. Basically, just try to do the best they can and I think they will probably succeed. But they do have to work hard and they have to get their work in on time. They have got to prepare well and they have got to test well. I think it's pretty straightforward. I don't think there are any secrets about how to do well at MIT. It's almost like a cookie cutter. It's not abstruse, there are no great nuances, students don't have to change their personalities or anything like that. It's just pretty straightforward. Just do the work and they will do well.

For graduate students, I think it is important for them to do the same thing as the undergraduates do, but to begin to get to know someone with whom they can work, to try to develop a relationship with professors who might take an interest in their work, and to be looking out for that. They need to be careful with whom they connect themselves because I think that's going to determine where they go, whose lab they get into, or what other kind of affiliation they have. They should get some publications under their belt. I think that's going to be critical if they plan to go on in academia. They should always look for an opportunity to publish or to add on to their professional profile. Get to know the community of people. Go to conferences. Take advantage and basically seek to be the best.

For faculty members, I think it's important right away to come and determine that you're going to do the best you can. There's no reason you won't succeed at that, but guard your time. What's going to count is your commitment to scholarship and scholarly productivity. That should take precedence over a lot of service. Service is important, but I think that that's more gradual than the scholarship. You've got to hit the road running because right away people are going to be looking at what kind of potential they think you have in a scholarly sense. They're going to assume that the service will come later. It's good to be a good teacher, but you've got to keep that under control too in terms of the amount of time you're putting into it. Your first few years really have to be built carving out your scholarly profile. If there is any fault, it should be a fault towards too much time to your scholarship. If you had to give up something, give up some of the service and the teaching rather than your scholarship. If anyone is going to fault you, let them fault you for having too much scholarship rather than too little. I think ultimately that's what's going to make the difference.

Try to develop a mentor. I don't know where the initiative comes from, whether it comes from you or the mentor. I think it will probably happen naturally. You have to be sort of open and cooperative to departmental needs and respond to them. That doesn't mean you have to do anything that diminishes your own integrity, but you do want to be cooperative and helpful. The Institute does have programs to help mentor junior faculty and they should take advantage of them, time off or whatever. They should be right there trying to utilize the resources.