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My dad died about twenty, twenty-five years ago. He was from Louisiana. He grew up in a little segregated town called Colfax and moved up to Chicago in what's now called the Great Migration back in the '50s and '60s. I don't know exactly when he moved here. He met my mom, who was German, in Europe—in Germany. He had been in the Army and, following the Army, he had attended university in Europe and met my mom, who was the daughter—one of five daughters—of my grandmother. There were seven kids. My mom was the daughter of a woman who was very internationally minded, as it turned out. Four of the five daughters married non-Europeans. She was the one who happened to marry a black American. They got married in Germany and had my sister and then myself. Actually, they moved back to Chicago, and I was born in Chicago in 1962.

My folks got divorced in 1963 or so. My mom moved back to Germany with my sister and myself, back to stay with my grandmother and the family in Munich. Then about 1970, my mom decided that she wanted us to live in Africa. We moved to Liberia, which happened to be a country where we had a couple of friends who had studied medicine in Germany. So we moved to Liberia. She had found a job there. We moved there and we stayed with this family for a year or so, and then got our own place. I basically grew up in Monrovia for ten years between 1970 and 1980. I went to grade school from third grade through high school. I graduated from high school in Liberia—Liberian schools—and then came back, back to the States for college.

Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Bernard Loyd in Chicago, Illinois, 4 May 1996.

Your father, you've mentioned, went to college?

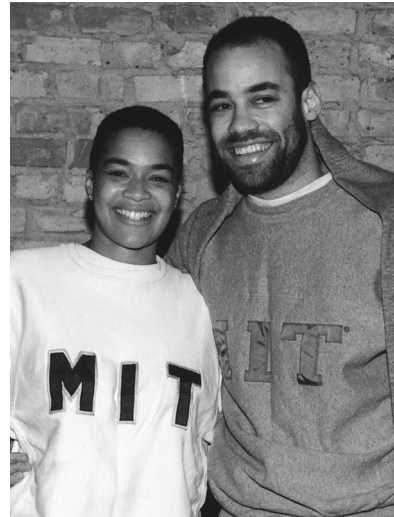
Yes, but I'm not sure which college, to be honest. My parents got divorced fairly early and then he died in a car accident in 1972, so I don't know what it was.

What about your mother's educational background?

She had basically the equivalent of a high school education in Germany. She was a secretary for most of her professional career.

What was your education in Liberia like?

I'd characterize it as being a very basic education, but a very solid education. It was basic in the sense of having two elective subjects. One elective subject was in sophomore and junior year, when typing was offered. Of course, we all took it because it offered you something different. The other was a very informal elective subject back in sixth grade



or so, fifth or sixth grade, when our math teacher decided that there were five or six of us who really ought to have a richer math curriculum. He invited a few of us to sit in on some special tutoring with him. It was very basic, but it was very solid in the sense that it was Catholic school all the way through and it was just focused on making sure that we had a solid foundation. We had a year of math, a year of trigonometry, and a year of chemistry and physics and so forth. But we didn't see calculus or any of that sort of thing.

So you finished high school there and then you came back to the States.

Yes, I came to the States. I had left when I was two, so “coming back” is a little bit of a stretch.

What caused you to come back, and what did you do when you got back?

I think there had always been the underlying assumption that we'd go to college. The U.S. made sense because the Liberian school system is patterned after the U.S. system, because of the history of Liberia. It was easier to come back. It was easier to come to the U.S. than it was to go to Germany or to some other country where the post-secondary school system would be somewhat different.

How did you find out about MIT? How did that come about?

Well, the one peculiarity about the Liberian school system is that the calendar is different. It runs from March or the end of February to December because of the hot and the wet and dry seasons, which run differently in the tropics. I was displaced a semester. I did not initially apply to MIT because MIT, like most other engineering schools, didn't accept folks in the off-semester because you had this rigid sequence of math courses, et cetera. So I didn't even apply to MIT. I applied to a couple places, among them Cornell. Actually, Cornell's engineering school didn't accept me either, for that reason. They suggested that I transfer my application to the school of arts and sciences because they weren't bound to that calendar.

So I went to Cornell my first year. I went to Cornell because I was always interested in aeronautical engineering. I was interested in building planes, primarily, and Cornell had the reputation of having a very strong aeronautical engineering

department. However, once I got there I found that the reputation had somewhat outlived the reality. In fact, the curriculum that was being offered in aeronautical engineering was fairly limited, and most of the stuff was mechanical engineering stuff with a couple of add-on courses. So in that first year I started looking around and MIT clearly had the top program in the country. I ordered a copy of the catalogue and looked at it. It was very clear that the offering was just an order of magnitude—several orders of magnitude—richer than the one I could have found at Cornell.

As an interesting aside perhaps, Wes Harris was mentioned to me at the time. One of the deans at Cornell knew Wes Harris. I heard about Wes when I was at Cornell. In fact, his name was only given to me after I had told Cornell that I had decided to leave. They figured that Wes would recruit me, if he hadn't already. I came to MIT as a sophomore, again in the off-term. But given that I was a sophomore, they didn't recognize that. I came to MIT in the spring of '91 as a first-semester sophomore, really.

Could you backtrack just for a quick minute, Bernard, and talk about how you came up with this interest in building planes?

Building planes? It's one of those things that you develop as a kid, I guess, that I developed as a kid. When I was ten or eleven in Liberia, I had a very good friend—a German kid—and he and I developed this passion for collecting airplane pictures. That was a little bit of a challenge in Liberia because this was back in the '70s and we just didn't get those things. We had this little bit of a rivalry going. I guess through that, together with always having been very attracted to mathematics, I figured I'd become an engineer and I'd build planes.

So you came to MIT your sophomore year. What were the highlights and what were the downs in terms of your expectation and what actually happened?

I think the highlights were very clearly the richness of the curriculum. It was what I expected. That was one highlight. A second highlight was the fact that a guy like Wes was there and was interested. As I mentioned, I got his name. Very early when I got there, it must have been the first four or five weeks, I just sort of dropped by and introduced myself to him. I remember that clearly. We had a nice discussion and he basically said,

“Look, when you’re ready to do some work—do some research—come back and see me and we’ll do some.” So that connection began very early and, in fact, six or nine months after that—after I had kind of settled in a little bit—I decided that I was ready, and from that point on we really began working together. I did some research with him and really continued working with him in some way or another for virtually all of my time at MIT. I spent a total of ten years at MIT, but virtually all of the nine or so remaining years I worked in some way directly with him on this particular research project which had been through my senior year. Then for a couple of years we didn’t work together when I got my master’s, but after I got into the Ph.D. program he was a member of my Ph.D. committee. I asked him to be a member of my Ph.D. committee.

Was he your major advisor?

He was not my major advisor. Another professor in computational fluid dynamics—Earll Murman—was my major advisor, but Wes Harris was one of the two other members of my committee. That was a highlight. I think from very early on I became involved with the BSU and NSBE. I also think my ability to get connected in that way was definitely a highlight. I think another general highlight was what I perceived to be the spirit of intellectual discourse, the level of intellectual discourse at the Institute. It was really a very challenging place to be. I always had the sense that it would push me as far as I could be pushed and in that sense it would develop my skills to the fullest.

Lowlights? I think coming in as a transfer was a little bit difficult. At the time they weren’t offering transfers any on-campus housing, so I lived off-campus for all my career there. Eventually they opened that up because they had the capacity, but I started off off-campus and I basically stayed off-campus.

As an undergraduate student?

As an undergraduate, yes, because the dormitory system was filled. They wouldn’t offer transfers any on-campus housing. So it was a little bit more difficult to get involved with the campus.

That didn’t deter you, though.

No, no.

You were very much involved, probably more than ninety-nine percent of the students I know.

Perhaps it helped that involvement because it forced me to seek some connections, to create some connections that I might have otherwise assumed.

You have to separate a little bit between the undergraduate and the graduate. I wanted to come back to the graduate piece just a little bit, but stick with that two or three years—three years—that you spent on the undergraduate level, if you can recall. As a black student in terms of your operating outside of that department, how were the services and the quality of the services outside of, say, the department of aeronautics and astronautics?

Well, if I think of my life back then, it was classes. Classes were quite a big part of my life as an undergraduate. It was this independent research that I was doing with Wes Harris and others, but primarily Wes Harris. It was sort of organizational connections—NSBE as well as BSU, primarily as an undergraduate. And working with different people. For example, very early on I got involved in admissions and those kinds of things. That’s three. A fourth was sort of the social scene. In fact, I began dating somebody at MIT—Laverne Gibson—fairly early, and that was a relationship that kind of carried through for a good bit of time. Fifth, there were sports. I spent a lot of time in the athletic facilities. Those were sort of my series of interactions with the Institute. I didn’t live in a dorm. I did a little bit of tutoring as well. That was, I guess, part of my BSU kind of thing. That was pretty much my interaction with the Institute. I didn’t, particularly as an undergraduate, interact with the official services very much.

Well, that’s helpful. Up to that point, before graduate school, obviously there is one person who was very influential in your career at that point. But who else were the role models and mentors during that period? I know one, but were there any others?

Obviously, Wes was probably the most influential person in terms of my professional as well as personal development. We worked together in some sense for many years. Wes was such a strong figure in the department and such a strong person that that certainly had a significant impact. There were probably a couple other folks. As an undergraduate, if we’re still confining ourselves to undergraduate, I guess I would say it would mainly be Wes. My other sort of official contact with the department was Ed Crawley, who was my advisor, my undergraduate advisor. I had another advisor

briefly before then, but that person left. That relationship with Crawley was certainly a positive relationship, but it wasn't as deep as the relationship with Wes. In graduate school, the other person who was really influential in my career was Earll Murman, who was my lead thesis advisor, head of the department, and one of the "great men" of the field. Earll has just been a tremendous mentor, sponsor, and role model for me.

Do you recall how you made the decision to move from your undergraduate to the graduate program?

Oh yes, it was very simple. I was there and it was a great learning experience, it was a great challenge. I had developed a good relationship with Wes and we had done some work that I did for my senior thesis. We would basically expand that for my master's thesis. I didn't apply anywhere else. I was doing well academically, so I didn't apply anywhere else.

How well were you doing, undergrad?

I had a 4.6 through undergrad, so sort of A-minus. I was quite comfortable with that. I didn't apply anywhere else. I had money from GEM, the GEM fellowships. Finances were not the issue, so it just made a lot of sense. I had an apartment that was reasonable.

So, it was just very obvious.

It was not a difficult transition or a difficult thinking process. I was well respected in the department, you know, all those kinds of things.

So you go into your graduate program. I have to allow you to put it in the context that you think is best, but talk about all of that work that you did. When I look at that whole period, the thing I remember the most is seeing your picture in Tech Talk holding those, was it five degrees?

They didn't all come at the same time.

No, they didn't come all at the same time. But you would have to admit that's very rare, right?

Not that rare. But you mentioned academics. There was one low point. My first semester I took 8.03 and I got a C in the course. I was pretty unhappy about that. That was another lowlight.

Take us very quickly through that graduate process and also the whole idea of getting the kind of exposure that you did get and coming up with all the degrees, and why those degrees.

The graduate process was really to me a fairly natural evolution. I mentioned how the master's happened. My intention had been to get only a master's. I had also always had an interest in economics. This was the other enrichment, actually. It wasn't an elective at the high school level, but it turned out we had an economics course in high school in my senior year, which was required of everyone. That sparked an interest in economics. When I got to Cornell, my initial interest had been doing an undergraduate degree in engineering and then doing a master's in business, sort of a five-year degree. Then I got to MIT and my focus shifted to be even more technical. I was really involved in lots of technical stuff. But even so, my intention had been to do the master's and then I was going to make a decision. Did I want to go on in a technical sense or did I want to do an MBA?

What happened in the master's is somewhat similar to what happened at the undergraduate level. I had developed some really good relationships with the folks I was working with, with Earll Murman. I had stumbled onto an area that I found to be really exciting, really challenging and exciting. It wasn't actually building planes, it was designing the aerodynamics or calculating the aerodynamics of planes. At some point I decided that the aerodynamics was more difficult than the construction, and therefore I shifted to that. I was in a situation where I had done some very interesting master's work. There was clearly some interesting Ph.D. stuff that could be done and I was fortunate enough to get one of the NSF minority fellowships. So once again I said, "A Ph.D. was not my intention, but I'm doing some good work and I'm having fun." At this point, actually in my senior year, I had started playing basketball. I still had some eligibility after my master's. I was becoming pretty involved in a number things around campus, so I decided that I would continue on and get a Ph.D.

The Ph.D. was difficult. It was really very difficult. My dissertation was very difficult, in particular, working with developing some numerical concepts around partial differential equations and developing a very large computer code. My memory of the most critical period is that I spent a couple of years doing research and taking classes, and then it was time to really pull it all together and get the code to work. To do that, I really basically ended all of the things I was involved with. I

finished up a year of being chairperson of BGSA, and that was over. I had finished my basketball thing. I was a freshman advisor to a number of students. That continued, but I virtually stopped everything and in two or three stints I spent five or six months and then four or five months out in California at NASA Ames working on my computer code. It was very intense. I would come in at three in the afternoon or so, and I would work through until seven or eight or nine in the morning on the code. I would do the reverse days. I would do that for four or six or eight weeks. I think once it was four weeks, and then I'd go back to Cambridge to deal with whatever was going on and meet with my advisor. Then a couple months later I would go back to Ames and then go for four or six weeks. I'd see a cousin of mine. When she went to work, I'd come in and crash in her apartment. I'd catch a few hours of sleep and at two or three I'd be back at NASA Ames. It was the best time to work because the computer was least used at that time. But it was very difficult because it was a very large code and for a long time it didn't work. There was no guarantee that it would work. Mathematically it should work, but there might be some kinks in there that I might not have accounted for.

So in terms of my Ph.D. experience, there are lots of pieces to that experience, but the academic dissertation piece was a very intense piece. It was a little bit complicated, more complicated at the end. Close to the end I decided I didn't actually want to go on to do teaching or further research or work in the industry, but I decided I would finish the Ph.D. That was a little bit of a complication. Then I actually overlapped. The history is that I said, "Look, I really have to decide now at this point. Do I want to go in a business direction or do I want to continue in the technical area?" I don't know, I guess it was the winter of either '87 or '88, I got a request to interview at the University of Maryland. They wanted me to come and interview for a faculty position. I decided to use that timeframe that they imposed on me to make a decision about the technical versus business question. I went and did the job talk and they indicated an interest. They requested a timeframe for me to get back and make a decision, get back to them with the decision. So I used that timeframe to make that decision. If I had stayed in academia, in the academic world, then I would

have considered additional options. For example, I would have been interested in MIT. I had held a discussion or two about pursuing faculty opportunities there.

But I decided that I would do business. In that last several years I had done a lot of work for organizations on campus, and I decided I would have more fun and would be able to contribute more working more intensively with people than working in academia.

That had to be a tough decision.

You know, it wasn't really that tough, because I had thought about it for awhile; it evolved out of thinking about it at a lower level for awhile. I think I was fortunate that I had folks around me, like my advisor, who understood the major things that I was involved with, but also that my interests in the long term might be broader than fluid dynamics.

About those first three degrees. You usually get a Ph.D. in engineering because you got a bachelor's and you got a master's. If you get a Ph.D., you're going to get those other degrees.

Is that what other people do?

Yes. If you get a Ph.D., you have to get a bachelor's and you have to get a master's in engineering.

The master's, though, you don't necessarily have to get.

In engineering you virtually always do. In science you have a bit of a choice, but in engineering you always do.

But what about the other two degrees?

The other two then came out of my saying, "Hey, I really want to do business. However, my background—although I've taken some economics all along—doesn't necessarily facilitate my entry into the business world. Therefore, I ought to go and get a bit of a business education." This was back, I guess, in '87. As it happened, at that time the Leaders for Manufacturing Program was starting up. Actually, I applied to two business schools. One turned me down.

How could they do that?

They called me in and they said, "These essays are not that well written." I said, "Well, you know, there were ten essays and I did them in a day." This was Harvard Business School. They had a lot of discussion. They said, "Well, we have had very good discussions, but the essays are a little bit of a problem." I said, "Fine." I think it was all for the

best because, as I said, the Leaders for Manufacturing Program was just starting out. I found out about it and I was able to get in. It was good from a couple perspectives. One is that they paid for my studies.

Is that the fellowship?

Yes, Leaders for Manufacturing—the LFM fellows program. They paid for business school. That was one very positive aspect of the program. The other was that they had a real focus on something in business—on manufacturing and on operations—and that gave me some focus, which I otherwise would not have had. Even in business, I think some focus is useful, even if you then decide to do something else. So the Leaders for Manufacturing Program then led to two degrees over a two-year period, one in business and one in some manufacturing-related area.

You would have to admit, though, that's somewhat unusual.

Yes. I think the record is set.

If you had to summarize all of your experiences at MIT—this whole process—when you look back on it, how would you summarize it in terms of how well it has helped you to be able to do many of the things you're doing right now?

I think MIT has been a terrific springboard from at least three perspectives. One is the hard skills that I got, both the skills in terms of actual knowledge as well as skills in seeking out knowledge. That's one aspect. The second aspect, and perhaps the most important aspect, is the confidence that I've drawn from going through the process, be it the coursework or really being confronted with difficult things and coming out, not always at the top end, but always surviving in one way or another and always taking something out of that. On the dissertation you're really going into new areas and being able to show to others, but more importantly I showed myself that I could contribute, that I could make something out of the fog or the complexity that was out there. That confidence, I think, is perhaps the most important thing. The third thing is the external perception that always helps me when I'm associated with MIT in some way. I do management consulting now. It's very different from what I spent most of my time at MIT doing. But frankly, the ability a) to say, "I'm from MIT," or for someone to say,

"He's from MIT"; and b) someone else to say, "Well, he's a rocket scientist"—which happens to be relatively true in my case, but more broadly it's a perception that's attached to the place—is just a tremendous brand to come in with and very unique relative to anything else I might come in with. I can't think of any other institution that would give me quite that.

So I think those three things have been very helpful. Actually, there's a fourth. I think a fourth is becoming increasingly important, and that is the connections on a personal or on a professional level that MIT has given me—personal in terms of friends. I'm very much connected with a number of MIT folks that went there when I was there, or they were there at some point. And then the professional connections. As you know, I'm still very involved with a number of things. But really, more so the personal at this point is extremely valuable to me.

That's well put. Two other areas very quickly. One is, is there any advice you would give on two levels—one, to black students coming to a place like MIT, as well as advice to the institution in terms of how we can do things better?

I guess my advice to students would be in three buckets, at least three buckets. One is that it's really important to have an understanding of what the academic piece of MIT is all about, and to really buy into that—sort of the fire hose and your needing to be able to drink from it and your really needing to have a commitment to just push yourself as hard as you possibly can, for your own sake and because you'll get so much out of the institution if you can sort of ride with that. Particularly coming in fresh—yes, there is just pass-fail the first year—just get a solid founding in that first twelve or eighteen months academically, and understand that in lots of ways the margin between understanding something well and not understanding it at all is fairly slim. You just have to push. Sometimes you get to a point and it's all a fog, and if you go a little bit further things begin to make sense.

I think in a number of areas there's sort of a discontinuous learning curve. It's not as if you learn linearly in many areas—if you put an hour in, you learn an hour's worth and that's worth half as much as putting two hours in. The alternate is that you learn and, if it doesn't make sense, you

keep looking at it from different perspectives and you keep trying to visualize it in different kinds of ways or play with it in different kinds of ways. Often you reach a point where suddenly it becomes much, much clearer. In many cases, you don't reach that point over ten hours. You look at this problem and finally you say, "Ah, this is the way I need to look at it." So I think a part of the magic is understanding that you may really have to push yourself a lot further and that the nature of the learning may in fact be so that you will get there, but it won't necessarily be apparent. You may have to use all kinds of different resources, all kinds of different ways of thinking about the problem or the set of problems in order to get there, not necessarily just one. Your way of thinking of it is going to be different from my way, different from the teacher's way. You have to just get a different set of perspectives.

So that's one. Having bought into this concept, "This is what the education is about, and it tries to be a meritocracy—it's not always, but it tries to be—and therefore you try to make it happen," I think is one of the things. Second is, fundamentally you're there because a lot of people looked at you and said, "Look, you can do it." And you can, if you define what "can do it" means in sort of that first way. There are lots of other things that you might be doing. There are lots of temptations, very valid temptations to do other things, but you have to weigh the value over the long term that you create by doing these other things versus really getting that solid foundation. I think Wes, to give an example, was one of the guys who kind of pushed me on that front. I remember once I was sitting working on a problem. I don't know what the problem was. I was working on some BGSA stuff and he was basically giving me the lecture of, "Just do the academics, because you can have lots more impact on the BGSA later." So you have to balance it. My choice at the time was, "Well, I have to do this stuff and do the academics as well." But early on, it's just really getting that foundation and having to commit, and then having the confidence in yourself that if you do it in this way it will come. Also, you need the confidence at least to ask for the help of people who can give it, regardless of whether it might seem a stupid question or whatever. The best questions are usually stupid questions. That's the question that you need answered for you to understand that. It

may be stupid to somebody else, but it is the right question for you. So maintaining that sense of confidence and being rooted in a traditional way, thinking like this, I think is very important.

The third thing I'd say is in the long run, in my view, one goes through the place and one succeeds in a place like MIT because one is rooted in something. There's a set of values in terms of community, in terms of a longer-term picture of what it all means and why one is doing the stuff. So come in with a clear sense, and that sense will change. As we go, that sense will change. For me, it changed from building airplanes—as sort of my youthful aspiration—to saying, "Hey, look I could do these other sets of things." But come in with a very clear perspective of who you are and how you're rooted and how your being in this institution is rooted in some fundamental beliefs you have about yourself and beliefs that other people have about you. For me, one simple example is a statement that someone made when I was in high school, which over the years has given me a sense of great confidence, just because that person made a statement. It was a classmate of mine who said to me sort of close to graduation, as I was going off to Cornell, something simple like, "Well, he would do well anywhere." It was just a classmate who said, "Look, I've got confidence in him." It has always stuck in my mind because he was a pretty good friend of mine, but also someone whose opinion I respected. So drawing on things like that to maintain a sense of self that is broader than all of the rocks, all of the sticks and stones, I think would be an important thing.

The second question was to MIT. I think perhaps the most important thing that MIT can do is to facilitate the community, the building of the community. There have to be numerous communities. There's an academic community and other communities within that. Just facilitate the building of communities that would provide some base for students coming in. It really is only one piece, in my view, of what a student needs, but it certainly can be a facilitated piece. I had that piece with Wes because Wes was a rock. I never really needed to take advantage of Wes as a rock, but I knew that I could. In a number of non-academic ways, I certainly did. I could go to him and talk to him about anything. But I'd say to extend that, that MIT can foster a community. One thing I would fault MIT for is, particularly where faculty and

senior administrators are concerned, that we—MIT—have not been very successful or very aggressive in trying to build such a community, admittedly given some fairly difficult circumstances. The faculty isn't a normal community in that sense or isn't thought of normally, but certainly we haven't been nearly as successful as we would like. This is particularly true for the group of black faculty and senior administrators.

So that would be one. Perhaps a second thing, a second aspect of that, would be at the personal level to continue to facilitate the sort of personal challenge to all—to each individual black student coming in—and to make sure that each individual knows that it's a personal challenge. The Institute sets a personal challenge to him or her, as an individual. The person may be black or whatever, but there's a personal challenge and a personal expectation that this person will deliver against that challenge. There's not a bunch of other stuff. There is every now and then an expectation that perhaps someone will not succeed. But that challenge is out there. In fact, that challenge is probably broader for black students than it is for other students. Our expectations of blacks at MIT should be that they excel academically, but secondly that they do something substantive with respect to the communities that are around Cambridge or back home. The challenge in those communities is greater than the challenge in the equivalent white communities some of our other students come from.

So I think making that twin challenge become very real is an institutional task that we have not been as successful at as we ought to be. Supporting that with a community of shared interests, or a number of communities of shared interests that would be supportive, would be the other key.

One thing that I remember very vividly, along with several other things that you were very instrumental in as a graduate student, was that you were determined to honor a person for whom I don't think the Institute had any appreciation. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Well, you're talking about John Turner—Dean Turner, I assume.

Yes.

I think as any black graduate student knows—who attended between, I guess, 1970 and 1990 approximately—John is one of those individuals who was

completely committed to building this one aspect of this community. He was committed on the job and committed off the job and committed to literally thousands of things that he did, that he and his family did. My view at the time was that we ought to honor that. There were a couple of aspects to the thing. One is that it seemed clear that perhaps the institution did not appreciate him as much as we did. In my view, the Institute didn't understand completely the extent of his contribution because it was in a thousand different ways and perhaps because he, in being committed to this cause, might have taken more risks than other people would have and undoubtedly some of those risks sometimes backfire. We were fortunate at that point in time that—it's probably called an asset—we were able to get some space as an organization, The Black Graduate Students Association. It was clear to me that if we were going to do something to honor Dean Turner, we would have to be the ones to do it. It was also clear that while what we had was very modest, it was all we had and we weren't going to be getting too much more. It was a significant improvement, and we weren't going to be getting a whole lot more in the foreseeable future. So it seemed appropriate that we dedicate our space, all we had, to the person who was most influential in our lives from an administrative perspective and from a leadership perspective.

We had discussions around that in the organization and some of these things. For example, “Why should we do this? This is too small and it ought to be grander and we ought to do something grandiose” came up. But I think the perspective that I championed won the day, and in the end we decided unanimously to make this dedication. I don't know, maybe it was my naiveté about the Institute, but this was going to be our thing. We didn't really want any Institute involvement per se, but we did think that we ought to have a little bit of fanfare about it. You were probably there at the time that we announced it. I made sure that the appropriate press people from the Institute were also present. The story ran, the dedication, and of course we made sure that his family was there, which would not normally have been the case. We tried to orchestrate it a little bit.

The humorous thing was a week or two after this thing, when I was walking by the office of the Dean of Student Affairs, Shirley McBay called me

in. She had gotten calls from the Provost's Office and the Office of the Corporation and all, asking about how could this thing be allowed to happen because only the Corporation can dedicate a building or any piece of a building to an individual. Her perspective was, "Why are you calling me?" We shared a little laugh together. I think most of us were very happy that it happened as it did.

I think it's an excellent example of what I think leadership can do and must do. Otherwise, if you go through a traditional way of doing things, it will never happen. I thought it was just fabulous that you and the others decided that that was what you were going to do and you did it. And it was well deserved by John. I just wanted to make sure that's on the record.

Yes, and the fact that we went that route. Most of us decided to go that route because we figured that was the logical route to go. But to just cap off that case, I think there's still a challenge out there. They'll say, "Dean Turner hasn't been recognized the way he should be recognized and it ought to be done." I think there's a challenge to the Corporation to consider John Turner as being one of the pivotal figures in graduate life, black graduate life at the Institute.

No doubt about it, absolutely. One final point. You must talk a little bit about what you're doing now, because you have spent five years working on a cutting edge of business consulting. Talk about that, and relate it to your experience at MIT, and how that has helped in terms of what you're doing.

I mentioned already a couple of aspects of my experience at MIT that have been very influential. I mentioned the three parts of the MIT experience—one is the skill, second is the confidence, and third is the brand, if you will, of the place. All of that in some way comes in daily. For example, management consulting is about solving management problems. It's not engineering problems, it's management problems. But the approach is very much the same. You take a big undefined problem, you try to refine it neatly, and then you try to break it into pieces. After you've broken it into pieces, you say, "Look, here's the most important part of the problem. Let me do some analysis around this part of the problem, this issue or this opportunity, and figure out how I can improve it." The thought process is very much the same, and what MIT does very, very well is that it forces a

very, very high level of rigor in thinking. So just cutting all of the stuff that is not pertinent to the problem, cutting it out, is what I do every day. The more I do that, that builds on specific skills that got honed at MIT. I'm in an environment where the language is different. It's the language of business as opposed to engineering, but the issues, generically speaking, are similar. When something doesn't work, you fix it, or you have an opportunity to do something and you try to adapt it.

The other thing that has been extremely helpful to me in this environment has been—is—the sort of leadership experience that I was able to build at MIT. When you think about leadership at MIT, and I was involved in a number of things, all of them were about leadership in some form—pieces of a student organization or other student organizations, being the chairman of the committee around admissions and financial aid and the BSU. I've forgotten what it was called, back in '83 through '85. But there was that, to doing the Ebony Affair for three or four years, to being a freshman advisor, to being, at the end, chairman of BGSA for a year. In all those headaches as a leader, at least as a designated leader, you've got to convince folks, you've got to set an agenda, you've got to convince folks to follow you, and you've got to do it in an environment where they've got all kinds of things going on. Everybody else, including yourself, has all kinds of other commitments. You have absolutely no leverage. You're not going to stop somebody's pay, you're not going to do any of those things. So you have to lead by example, you have to lead by giving people ownership, you have to lead by setting values and goals—all those kinds of things. That experience has just been tremendously helpful to me in this environment. I've never had the temptation to say to a client, "You're going to do this because you have to"; I've always come from the perspective of, "You're going to do this because I'm going to figure out a way that there's a win-win between us for you to do this." I think it has helped me very much in my interaction with my clients and interaction with my teams at McKinsey.

Could you say a little bit about your experience as a Corporation member?

It was a fascinating and very rich experience. The Corporation needs to talk about stuff that's at the very highest level of interest to MIT. In that sense,

it was educational for me. I presumed to make some contribution in the dialogue. I think an aspect that was particularly rich for me was that I was serving on the visiting committee of the astro department, along with a couple others. In fact, in this period of serving on the Corporation there the astro department went through a number of changes driven by the shift from the Cold War era to the current era. It was a fundamental strategic realigning, repositioning of the department led by Earl Murman. As a visiting committee member, I had some small perspective on that and purview to that.

So it was just a very rich experience. One thing you learn in those settings, and I'm not particularly good at it, is how to frame things—how to frame thoughts and discussions so that you have a chance of having some impact, how to frame your thinking to be able to try to connect with people. I'm learning in that area, but it has been a tremendous experience.

A couple of things that we touched on we didn't cover deeply. One would be athletics. It was a terrific experience for me. It was an unusual experience because I started as a senior playing for a varsity team.

Who was your coach at that time?

Leo. Well, Pat O'Brien and then Leo Osgood in the last year. That was a terrific experience. I played five years. Actually, one year I started and then—it was my first year in graduate school—it was just too much and so I had to cut. I said, "Okay, I won't be playing varsity this year." I'll just mention that as having been one of the communities and a terrific experience.

You clearly have been, I would say, one of the students who we would say is "a person for all seasons." I think the record will show that and the future, I think, will also show that.

The future is important, so we'll wait on the future. I think a number of us hope that we've made our small contributions as we went through. The other thing I'd mention, that's more in the form of a contribution, is the opportunity to get involved in a leadership way, and the obligation to do what one can and to contribute to the building of the institution. I was fortunate enough to have the ability to fulfill some of that obligation.

I was trying to refer to the opportunity to provide leadership. One thing, if you look at my

nine years at MIT, what might jump out at you is that in fact the only sort of senior leadership position I held was fairly late in my career—a year as chair of the BGSA. I held a number of other leadership positions within organizations before that. So the couple of comments that I would make are, one, that there are lots of opportunities out there to provide leadership, and we ought to see that as an obligation at some point to provide leadership somewhere, whether it's as head of a committee or whatever. That tended to be my leadership contribution for most of my time there. The other comment is, when it does become clear that an even more substantive role would be appropriate, why don't you take that opportunity? You know, for me it was after a number of years of heavy involvement, finally saying, "Okay, well, I will run to become chair," and then coming in with an agenda and trying to deliver on that agenda.

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By: Clarence G. Williams

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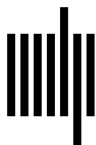
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