JOHN S. WILSON

BA 1979 (business administration/management) Morehouse College, MTS 1981, MEd 1982, and EdD 1985 Harvard University; administrative assistant to the associate provost, MIT, 1983-1984; associate, Analytical Studies and Planning Group, MIT, 1985-1986; associate, Financial Operations Group, 1986-1988; from assistant director to associate director of corporate development, 1988-1991; director, School Development Services, and associate director, Foundation Relations, 1991-1994; director, Foundation Relations and School Development Services, 1994-   ; assistant provost for outreach, 1997-   ; chair and co-director, Bridging Bridges, 1992-   , an urban initiative aimed at enriching lives of African-American males in the Boston area.

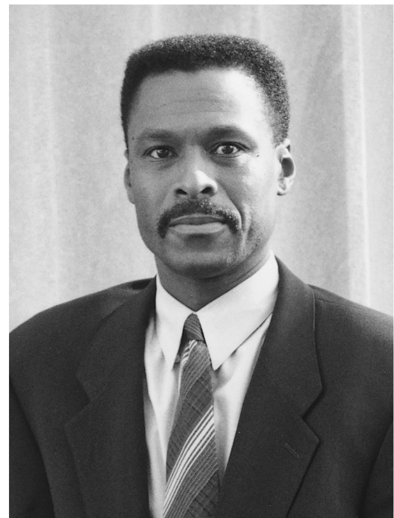
I grew up in Philadelphia and then suburban Philadelphia, in one of the standard African-American families. My mother was a teacher and my father was a preacher, so I was getting the moral and the academic training and drilling for my whole upbringing. They said I was going to be smart and righteous, that was the thing. I had one brother—a younger brother—and an older sister and a younger sister. My mother, being a teacher, emphasized education. She frowned on anything less than an A or a B. B's were kind of acceptable. Academic excellence was always the thing. My father was the first and greatest hero of mine—being a preacher—because I saw from a very early time just by using words up on that stage he could make people cry. I mean, I thought that was power. And it was a healing power. So I had two powerful parents. It was a broken family because, when I was in about third grade, they broke up and I got a stepfather who was not a preacher but a deacon in the church, and a powerful deacon.

That was my family background. Education was stressed throughout, and when my family broke up, my mother—being a teacher—went for a higher salary by moving to the suburbs where predominantly white schools were looking for black teachers so they could integrate. So they hired her out there. She got more of a salary so that she could support us. That explains our move to the suburbs. Then education became something a little different for me. It was difficult.

About how old were you then?

I was nine, eight or nine. I was no longer in a warm, nurturing environment, nor was my mother. She was catching it going into a white environment, an all-white environment. So we stayed connected to the church and that was our sanity. We'd just drive into Philly on many weeknights and all weekends to get sort of relief from this predominantly white environment. We started getting into it, and of course no matter what, my mother was saying, "You're catching hell during the day, but you're still going to do well in school."

But I was really turned off by the white environment. My mother and father were graduates of black colleges. Staying at home was not an option. My father said, "When you graduate from high school, you're either going into college or you're going into the Army, but you're leaving this house—that's the bottom line." I was not crazy about the Army. I'm not a violent kind of guy, so



Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with John S. Wilson in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 30 April 1996.

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I said, "Okay, let me key in on black colleges," because I had had enough of the white educational environment.

How had you done, though, in that particular environment?
B average, B-plus average, which was mediocre in my family. My older sister, for instance, managed well. It was a little different for females, but she managed well. She had an A average and she went to Swarthmore, where she had an A average, and then she went to medical school. She really had a different kind of experience. But it was a little more difficult for me, about the same for my younger brother, and most difficult for my younger sister for a variety of reasons.

At any rate, since I knew I had to get out of the house and I knew of the two options college was it, I became very interested in black higher education. Now, as it turns out, it wasn't that serendipitous because the pastor of my church—the church we were going to at this point—was a Morehouse graduate. And he preached Morehouse as much as he preached Jesus.

You got the message.
Yes. So I knew about Morehouse. That became a solution—a black college, number one, and then since he was talking about Morehouse. But I liked home. I was very close to my mother and I didn't want to go too far from my father or my stepfather. I wanted to reconnect with my father.

So I applied to Lincoln University first, got in, and then I applied to Penn State too because my mother wanted me to apply there. I got in there. I applied to no other white schools. I just didn't want to. Then I had my roommate at Lincoln, I had a key to my door, and about July I said, "I think I should consider Morehouse. I think I need to go there." My minister wrote a letter, made a phone call, and I was accepted over the phone. They called and said, "Come on down a few days early and you can fill out the application and we'll get you in a room."

So I went to Morehouse and Morehouse was the most psychologically, intellectually, and spiritually wholesome four years that I've ever had in education. It was a powerful experience.

Talk about that. So many of you mention Morehouse. I haven't met a Morehouse man who did not have that kind of feeling about their experience there.
There are some who have a negative experience, but there aren't a whole lot. It was positive for me because we were in the spotlight, we were in focus. There they had in focus who you are as an African-American, as an African-American male, as an ambitious person, as a person who is trying to do something with your life. So the whole context, the whole environment, is geared toward that. I had never had that in my educational experience, and I was a minority in three or four ways—an African-American in a predominantly white environment. I was on the outskirts of a lot of things. You just weren't accepted in ways, and there's no such thing as an entire faculty having people who are like you in mind, as they think about how they're going to educate us. The whole faculty was of one accord, "We're educating these men to change the world in a certain way. We understand their circumstances, most of them. You can make generalizations about it in some ways. We understand that and we understand what it's going to require."

The other thing is the environment itself. Here I am, living in buildings named after people I wanted to be like. I lived in Howard Thurman Hall, then I moved to W. E. B. Du Bois Hall. I stayed in W. E. B. Du Bois Hall, worshipped and got educated in the Martin Luther King Chapel, ate in the Benjamin E. Mays Cafeteria—I mean, the symbology, man, the symbolism.

Powerful. Nowhere I know of can you experience that.
Yes. Everywhere you go on campus it's like that. Then Spelman is right across the street, so you got a social orientation too. Everything was provided for there. That's why it was psychologically wholesome. I did not have to deal with racism. There wasn't a black student union, there was a student union. There was a student government. We didn't have a black caucus.

It was just a caucus, right?
It was just a caucus on a number of issues. So a whole psychology of attack, or of being under attack, was removed. With that out of the way, man, it became a pretty clear focus for me. I could really get my mind on what it needed to be on. So I was about leadership.

There were some bad experiences there, but by and large it was positive. I guess since I'm naming most of the positives, I'll name one bad. I was a good baseball player, I was a solid baseball player in

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high school. One of the things I did well is sports. I thought I was solid going into Morehouse, went out for the team, had a flawless tryout and everything, and was cut. Some of the guys on the team came to me later and said, "Man, you have game, so you should have made it." I was told later on that the coach, being a Southern guy, was partial to guys from the South and from Atlanta, in particular, and wasn't going to take a guy from the North on his team. You had to be pretty much hooked up if you were from the North and wanted to make it on that team.

That was freshman year. I decided at that point I was going to be a book man. I was going to say, "Okay, I didn't transfer. I didn't go off the deep end." I just said, "All right, that's one of the things I wanted to do, to see if I could make the pros and everything. But rather than emphasize that, I'm going to just go ahead and get into the books." I had solid grades there. I got into a lot of things, too. I was in a fraternity and in the student government and president of the class and all that kind of thing, so the academic development suffered a little bit because of those social pursuits. I had a B-plus average—3.3, something like that, out of 4.

Who were some of your mentors in that period?
Benjamin Elijah Mays was a mentor for me. I wanted to be like him. He was still around campus and I interacted with him. Hugh Gloster, the president of Morehouse, I checked him out a lot.

We worked at Hampton together.
He and I are still in touch. He wrote recommendations for me to get into Harvard, where I went after Morehouse. He has written recommendations for me for fellowships. I'm one of his favorites. He's a first-class guy. Those two guys, in particular, and then there were a number of professors with whom I'm still in touch. I'm still in touch with them, mostly in the religion department.

I also talked to a couple of roommates of yours. I interviewed James Mack.
He was cool. I liked him.

We were talking about you and your other buddy.
Oh, Spike Lee.

You guys were fairly close, I guess.
Yes, we were very close. Actually, James did not room with me, he roomed with Spike. He roomed with Spike for a year. Those two were the odd couple. It was funny, man, because James was 6′6″, 300-plus pounds, and Spike was 5′6″ or 5′4″ or something like that.

That's another part that I think I hear you saying too, and that is, given all the other really positive things, you develop friends for life.
For life, absolutely. Most of the guys I'm still in touch with now whom I call close friends I went to Morehouse with. I'm still in close touch with four or five dozen people and a smaller number on a really regular basis. But you're definitely talking friends for life when you talk about Morehouse, because the bonding that goes on there is strong—I think in part because you have so much choice.

When I was in high school, I interacted with black folk because they were black folk. They were okay, but I was clearly interacting with them because they were black, because they were having the same experience and we had a common experience in that one environment. At Morehouse, I had my choice. There was such a variety of people and so you gravitate toward people, and that's how friendships happen. When you're in a minority, you're not that discriminating about who you hang out with. You're always hanging out with other blacks. It happened again at Harvard, when I went to Harvard after Morehouse. It wasn't that I didn't have white friends and associates. Sure, I'm no stranger to the white world, but there's a certain level of common experience you have with people and that common experience draws you together.

So that's what happens. At Morehouse, that dynamic was not present. Everybody was black, so you made friendships based on other things that were deeper than just a superficial matter of color and culture. You used deeper stuff.

We probably should move on from Morehouse, but let me ask you just another question. You sort of touched on it, but it's worth a couple of other comments. Again, I have met just those of you who are really seemingly always on the cutting edge of leadership in some form or fashion. Is that something that is actually built into that whole program, do you think, when you look back on it?
No question. There's a saying that Morehouse holds a crown over your head, which for all your life you have to strive to grow tall enough to wear. In other words, you're on a mission when you

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leave Morehouse and that is to make change, to make a difference.

One of the amazing things that happened at Morehouse—powerful experiences—was that every week, twice a week, we heard speakers. We were to sit. We had assembly in the freshman and sophomore year, and then junior and senior year you had the option. Most of us still went to hear speakers twice a week, speakers from all over the country—Jesse Jackson, Dick Gregory, Ralph Abernathy, Calvin Butts, Thomas Kilgore, and others. Most of the major black male voices at least in any given year come through Morehouse at some point. It's like this speaker's forum. Most of the guys coming out of Morehouse know what a good speech is, know what a good sermon is. It's kind of like the Apollo Theater. When you come to Morehouse to speak, you'd better be good. You'd better have something to say or else you're going to be in trouble. With that kind of thing as one of the core aspects of the culture there and the environment there, your standards get raised.

Then again, as I mentioned, the buildings are named after guys who made a difference. And if you ever dreamed of posterity, then you think, "Well, how can I get my name on a building here at Morehouse, other than being so rich I can buy a building and put my name on it?"—that is, to achieve, to help somebody, to be like King and Du Bois and Thurman and Ben Mays and people like that. So that's the orientation there. You've got to go out of here and be accountable. "Come back and make a difference. Don't just go on off somewhere and . . ."

It's just amazing in terms of the kinds of programs that Morehouse has that bring all of you back to honor those of you who really have led the way, so to speak. I don't know of a school like it. It's amazing. Frank Jones always talks about that Morehouse spirit and everything. It's worth everybody having the sense to look at it.

Now you decided at some point that you were going to go on beyond Morehouse. Did you go on to grad school, or did you decide to do something different after you left there? How did that happen?

Well, I was a business major at Morehouse, and a religion and philosophy minor. I majored in business because I thought I was going to take over my uncle's undertaking business. I decided not to do that, obviously. My father was a preacher, both grandfathers were preachers, and my great-grandfather was a preacher, so we had that in our guts and I wanted to study that. I wanted to try to understand that.

I knew that was temporary because, as I said, I interacted a lot with Hugh Gloster and Ben Mays. They became my heroes and I decided pretty much at Morehouse that I wanted to be a college president. I thought that's a great way to make change, which is what we all have to do. So I said, "But first, before I get into that, I want to study, I want to answer some of these questions in my head about religion and the history of religion." I felt I was ready at that point, because of the Morehouse experience, for any educational environment. So it wasn't like coming out of high school, where I was like getting turned off of education altogether. When I finished Morehouse, I said, "Let me at it."

So I applied to Harvard and Yale. I applied to all the top programs and got into all of them. I got all kinds of offers. Yale wanted me the worst, but I decided to go to Harvard because that's where one of my mentors down at Morehouse went—to Harvard Divinity School. So I went to Harvard Divinity School and studied for two years. I was considering going on to get a Ph.D. in the history of religion because a lot of what you hear now about Afrocentricity and how our roots go back to ancient Egypt, I was studying that back in '79, '80, and '81. And I knew it was true. Before there was the term Afrocentricity, I'm studying this at Harvard Divinity School, history of religion. I'm seeing all this stuff lead back to Africa. I was struggling with the faculty at Harvard Divinity School. I'm asking all these questions nobody else was asking. The professors there—some were accepting of that view, most were dismissive of it, and some even derisive of it, making jokes. I was like, "Okay, look, I've got a big decision to make with my life. Am I going to get a Ph.D. in this and try to advance what I think would be a very powerful thing to do?"

I went to Princeton. I went to like two or three places, Princeton in particular because there was a professor at Princeton who I thought I might study with. He said, "Look, I know what you're after, but it's not time for it because you won't find anybody to study with." He was in flux at Princeton. He was getting ready to leave. So at that point I said, "Okay, well, instead of going to get a Ph.D. in this and trying to change the curriculum at a school, I'll go figure out how to run a college."

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So I got the degree, but then shifted out of the Divinity School and went to the Harvard Graduate School of Education. There was a Morehouse grad there, Chuck Willie. I went and talked with him about my disappointment in the field and he said, "Well, you know, you can get a doctorate in education here in a program called Administration, Planning, and Social Policy, and be a leader that way—lead a school, lead a college like you say." So I said, "Okay." I stayed and did a master's and a doctorate in administration, planning, and social policy. I spent four more years at Harvard, so that was six years at Harvard. Then toward the tail end of that experience, I started working here at MIT.

Before you get to that, you mentioned Chuck. The mentors in that phase of your life and career, were there any others other than, say, people like Chuck?

Yes. Chuck Willie was a key mentor for me. Professor John Williams and Professor Marvin Lazerson, who subsequently went down to Penn and is now at Penn. John and Chuck Willie are African-American, Marvin Lazerson is white. All three of them were very, very influential on me. Marvin is tough, Chuck Willie is tough. Chuck, of course, had the more focused relationship, being a Morehouse graduate and really wanting to help me. So there again, the role of mentors and key faculty members who took personal interest was key. That made the difference.

When you started working here, if I remember correctly, you actually were working on your dissertation. You and somebody else came here to talk about possible internships.

Yes. Sulayman Clark and I. Sulayman Clark came with me and we worked under Shirley McBay. Chuck knew Shirley because Shirley's ex-husband worked at Morehouse, was a professor at Morehouse—Henry McBay. So he sent us down here to work with her. I worked part-time with Shirley just on a number of policy issues, and then with Frank Perkins.

You may recall, actually, the two of you came to see me first.

That's right, we came to see you first. There's no question about that.

What I said was that I did not want you to work for me because you needed to work with someone who was in the structure of the institution.

We came down here first and talked with you. You put us with Shirley. I really touched base with you, and then throughout all the experiences I've had here with Frank Perkins, with Constantine Simonides, and then with Jim Culliton, and then when I went to the Development Office.

That was tremendous. It had never been done before. When you came in, I think you recommended that you would like something like that—between you and Jim Culliton and Constantine and whoever it was—but nobody had ever come here and done what you had done to get familiar with a lot of areas in such an in-depth way. You spent some three or four months in each one of these areas.

Right. That happened under Jim Culliton. I started off in the President's Office, in the analytical studies office, and did the study—Blacks at MIT.

Talk a little bit about that, because that was a very significant study that we are still using in many ways. Was there anything shocking to you, coming out of the kind of background you came out of, which was very rich, to have a study to hear what blacks were saying about MIT, those who had graduated?

Well, not really shocking. I mean, it is shocking on one level because it should be shocking. I mean, that's some powerful, powerful stuff. But I had a familiarity with it because that's what I went through in high school, to be in an environment where you feel like the people are enemies. They're not interested in you. They're giving you this knowledge grudgingly. And that's what I went though in high school, so that took the shock away. It did not take the hurt away. It did not take the pain away. It just took the shock away. I had concluded that that's what you get from a white environment. That's why I chose a black environment for undergrad and then was ready, had the wholesome experience and was ready for any environment after that. But a lot of these kids who come to MIT have not had the wholesome experience, so therefore are not armed with the psychological wholeness you need to succeed in that environment.

So what I was reading, when I was reading these experiences and hearing about them in the interviews and writing them up, was people who came to this environment and got chewed up and did not have a set of core strengths to allow them to sustain, many of them. Some did, obviously. Some got hooked up in local churches or what-

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ever, but just had something that told them, "No, you're not dumb, you can do it, you can make it." The environment can really beat you down.

That study was fascinating for me. I essentially spent a year-plus studying the ugliest aspects of this institution. Were you to ask me in that year-plus working on that assignment whether I would be here ten years later, I would not have said "No," I would have said "Hell, no." My feeling was that I was going to leave this environment. I said, "Okay, I'm going to do this and get a few other bits of knowledge and then move on out of here."

I grew up in a way because I understood that the same study could be made of most predominantly white universities—studying that period when minority enrollment first shot up in '69 and then through the first fifteen or so years of being in the white environment. That's pretty much par for the course. As a matter of fact, we did some benchmarking. We took a look at Brown and Wellesley and other people who were doing reports, and had been doing reports, and they were very similar—very similar experiences and everything like that, in stark contrast to my experience at Morehouse. That's the thing I go back to again and again because this trauma that I was studying, you didn't see at Morehouse. There were other reasons to have protests and other issues. Morehouse had its shortcomings but they did not relate to the kind of problems you had here on this campus at MIT.

So what happened was, the factor that kept me going—the main factor—was just before coming here, I got married. I married Carol Espy. She was a graduate student here. We had met each other a couple years before and determined that we were going to finish our degrees—both in '85—and then leave the North and go back South. She's from Atlanta, so everything was fine. I was on schedule to finish in '85 and had a job offer from Tuskegee, so I was going. We were ready to go. And then Carol, for reasons much more related to this environment than to her own competence, was delayed. There are all kinds of stories I could tell you about that and the treatment she received in her department. So I had a choice between finding a job here in Cambridge or in the Boston area or having a long-distance marriage. If you know Carol, you understand why I opted to be with Carol. She's quite a lady, so I decided to stay here.

Having known people at MIT, I decided to work here. But you see, my whole mentality and the reason why I went back into that was because I still wanted to be a college president. I took that job because I thought it would just be a year long and Carol would be finished by then. Well, she took two more years. So by the end of that year, when I realized she was going to be another year, I said, "Let me begin to get the skills that I am going to need to preside over a college one day."

So that's when I sought out Jim Culliton. I said, "I've got to know how to manage money." If I saw anything at Morehouse, I saw all kinds of glitches in the finance area. Too many things were happening that shouldn't have happened, particularly when I compared it to Harvard where things were much tighter in that area. So I said, "If anybody does it well, it has to be MIT. I'm going to understand financial operations." So I went with the vice president for financial operations, Jim Culliton. I sought your advice. When I said, "I've got to be here another year, Clarence," I came and you knew Jim and you respected Jim and you introduced me to him. And there we went. Constantine sort of pointed his way too.

So I hooked up with Jim, and of course Jim really received me. He was great. He took me under his wing for a couple of years. That was a two-year commitment. Carol finished after that first year. I said, "Carol, I'm committed with Jim for another year. I like this stuff. Why don't you start teaching here at MIT or doing something?" So she got a post-doc and we stayed another year. Then she made a two-year commitment and that's the way it's been ever since. Our commitments have been overlapping. Obviously, if we wanted to control that, we could have. I started to understand that MIT is a land of plenty when it comes to understanding administrative techniques and that I could get a wealth of knowledge here, put it that way. I finished with the financial operations and I realized that, in addition to learning how to manage money, you have to have money in the first place. That was another problem I saw at Morehouse. We didn't have a whole lot of money down there or a whole lot resources flowing into the place. So I said, "Let me try to understand fundraising."

Well, we were on the verge of leaving because we had gotten an offer from Wisconsin and everything. Then I remember I came to you again and

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you took me out of your office, man. This was a moment. I came here, man, and I was very emotional when I came to your office. I was feeling it. It was a tough time because I said, "I've finished this experience with Jim. We have an offer from Wisconsin." We had just found out we were having twins and probably didn't want to move. So I said, "What can I do here at MIT?" I came to you. I had sent the word out to a few people that I wanted to stay here at MIT and probably wanted to learn how to raise money, and nothing was happening. This was late in spring, so I thought we were going to be forced to leave because there weren't that many options. And I came to you and I said, "Clarence, I've done too much for MIT for it to end like this." I went through a living hell researching that stuff in the first year and I feel like I paid a high price because there was a lot of stress. It was a lot of stress looking at that stuff just for me personally, and then Carol was under her own stress to finish her Ph.D. So that was not a healthy year or two of marriage, first year of marriage. I felt like it was this environment that did it, because I was studying, living, and working here. We were tutors.

At any rate, I came to you and I said, "Man, if there's something in this administration or in this institution that can hear what I'm saying to you, then you help them hear it." Essentially I was saying, "I think MIT owes us, owes it to me and to us to find an opportunity here that would at least give me a chance to do more for MIT while I can learn at the same time." And you did your magic. You went and talked with a few people and made them understand the situation.

Paul Gray.

You went to Paul Gray, went to the top. Then within a few weeks, I understood it to have been discussed at Academic Council or something like that, I got a call—a powerful phone call—from Fred Gross. First I got a call from you and you said, "John, I think you're going to like this." Then I got a call from Fred Gross who was in resource development and corporate development, and he said, "I want to talk with you about working here." And Glenn Strehle, who was vice president then, and Fred Gross took me into their office and talked with me about the experience. Understand, I had no fundraising experience, but I was smart and a quick study and I could pick it up. And I knew. I promised you, I promised myself, I promised God, I was going to show everybody that I could perform.

Well, there was never any doubt about that.

Yes, but with the delay in this invitation to have this opportunity, I said, "Okay." I didn't think anybody was doubting my abilities, I just thought that there was something in this environment that wasn't paying attention to what I was trying to say. So I decided that I was going to clean up shop. I was going to do a great job of this. Fred and I hit it off and we did well.

You grew to like him, didn't you?

Oh, a lot. Fred Gross was a mentor, and that's what I needed in that environment. He was a very sensitive guy and very understanding. We became friends. I had dinner at his house and he had dinner at my house, and that doesn't happen all the time. He was a genuine, genuine person. There wasn't this period of discomfort with him, as there can be sometimes in environments like this. We really became true friends and we're still in touch. As a matter of fact, as we speak in 1996, I talked with him last week and just called him yesterday and left a message saying give me a call about something. So we're still in touch.

But I had a good two and a half years with Fred Gross and then shifted to school development services and foundation relations. I was working under Barbara Stowe. At that point she was director of foundation relations. Then she moved to vice president and then moved me up right behind her. We had a great relationship and I performed for her. She saw me perform for Fred, so she put me in the director position.

There's nobody I've seen who has been able to go in that particular area and actually prove themselves and move up, nobody. I mean, I haven't seen anybody yet—certainly nobody black. It's unheard of. Talk a little bit about what your responsibilities are. I think it needs to be there for the record. One needs to know because this has never happened.

I came into development in 1988 and, as I said, worked for Fred Gross. Essentially, I have come from going out on the road with him asking for twenty-five thousand, fifty thousand dollar grants to now running an office that brings in thirty-two million dollars a year. That's the growth. I have fourteen people reporting to me. It's one of the

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three areas in resource development—foundation relations and school development services on the one hand, corporate development, and then major gifts, individuals. So it's been quite a growth experience. I have performed well and then had good people around me and good support. Right now we target foundations in America and now throughout the world—we're going international now—and we bring in a whole lot of money for various programs at MIT.

Without really getting into the details, which I'm sure you wouldn't want to do, there is a certain amount of strategy that is involved. In generalities, can you say a little bit about how you orchestrate strategy to be able to pull off the raising of a large sum of money like that?
We focus in on what we call market-ready initiatives, that is, academic initiatives here at MIT—a program, a laboratory, a Shakespeare project—some kind of initiative that has a clear statement of its purpose, a budget, a faculty champion, a short statement of its purpose so that you can base a letter on it, a number of ingredients that make up a market-ready initiative. We work with the professor who is the champion and we will go and write a letter. First of all, we'll read the information to determine what the focus is. We'll do a foundation search to figure out which foundations give money in areas of interest that relate to this initiative that this professor has. So we'll come up with a list of foundations that are a match for that. Then we'll pick half a dozen of them and write a letter based on the information we have on the initiative, write a letter saying, "Here's an initiative we think fits with your priorities. We would like to come and talk with you about it. We'll be in town on X-date, could we visit? We'll call you in a few days to see if you're available, see if this can be a time we can identify."

We make the phone call and get a visit most of the time. We go to the foundation with the professor to sit down and talk about the initiative. The goal of that visit would be for them to invite us to submit a proposal. Usually it happens. We come back here and write a proposal by the agreed-upon deadline, submit it, and wait for the word on funding. That happens again and again and again throughout the year.

That doesn't account for the full thirty million dollars, a little more than thirty million. Now we're around twenty-five to thirty million. What accounts for a lot of it is fellowship agreements that we already have with funders. There are individuals who decide to give out of their foundations directly. There are charitable trusts that give to various areas. All of that gets counted in our area and we have to steward it, we have to keep track of it. We bring in a large portion of it along with faculty, and that's one income stream. There are other income streams where we don't have direct responsibility for reeling it in, but we do have direct responsibility for tracking it and writing reports to the donors on it and also writing thank-you letters and renewal letters. You have to manage all of the money that comes into that area.

It's a lot of work, but it's fun and it's exciting. There's nothing more exciting to me than seeing a faculty member with an idea who then some amount of time later on has funding for the idea and can do what he or she wants to do.

I have two other areas I wanted you to respond to very quickly. One is that, above all of these things that you do in this particular job, you have maintained what that Morehouse tradition has instilled in terms of service to the community and to your school. Could you talk a little bit about those things? I'm very familiar with them, but I want to hear you talk about particularly your commitment to things that you've done in this community, as well as things you've done outside of this institution that are related to helping your own institution.
Again, the impulse gets back to the Morehouse command and demand to lead, to do something, to make a difference. That's part of why I've remained connected to the community. Then also my mother and my grandmother are very service-oriented. Many Friday nights we would go to my grandmother's house in Philadelphia and send boxes to Mississippi, to Africa, and to Indian reservations. We would collect clothes and canned foods and send them down South. Our whole orientation was service, and then it got reinforced at Morehouse.

So when I came up to Cambridge, and after I got out of school and started working here at MIT, I became president of the Morehouse Alumni Association. We have a threefold mission. We wanted to recruit for Morehouse, we wanted to raise money for Morehouse, and we wanted to engage in community service. The recruitment we did through an annual Glee Club concert—that was recruitment and development. That's about all

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we did before I came on. I said, "We've got to do more than just have a Glee Club concert every year." And there you see a bunch of Morehouse guys in the back after that, praying that we didn't lose money—"Oh, I hope we don't have to go into our pockets to pay for this," you know, at the back of the church.

That's the kind of operation it was. We weren't raising that much money. So what I said was—and this coincides with my learning how to raise money at MIT—"Okay, we're finishing up a campaign here at MIT for seven hundred million dollars. I'm understanding what it takes to raise a lot of money. Let me try in my spare time to do something for Morehouse College as president of the Alumni Association." So I said, "Look, let's do something here. First of all, we're going to tighten the community service. I'm going to start a program." Instead of going out and starting a new program and trying to get a whole bunch of young men, I looked around and I said, "There are programs that are like that"—principally a program that you started with Concerned Black Men and the Paul Robeson Institute—"and it would be reinventing the wheel to start another program like that. I don't want to be in competition with those guys. They've already done it and they're a great bunch of guys. Let me seek them out, work with them; call Sid Holloway." I met Sid when I first got up here. I said, "Let's start a new program, but instead of starting a new program, let's get existing programs together and we regard each of those programs as bridges in the community and bridges to the community. So by getting them together we're bridging the bridges, bridging bridges."

So I said, "Sid, I want PRI to be the flagship program in Bridging Bridges. We'll get a whole bunch of other programs together—W. E. B. Du Bois Academy, Save Our Youth, Gang Peace, six or seven others." We brought them in and got a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, $160,000. Bam, there you go! Okay, I know how to raise money—$160,000. These guys hadn't seen $160,000 before. So we brought in that and then started our program meeting on Saturdays. This was paying dues. You help somebody, you help these kids, you see their faces, you bring in speakers every month, and then you take them out on learning trips and things like that. That's what makes me feel whole and complete, to be able to do that.

That was one piece of it—Bridging Bridges. As I said, we also had to raise money for Morehouse. Spike Lee came up here teaching at Harvard and he asked me to teach the course with him. I had done some teaching at Harvard while I was a grad student there in the African-American studies department, and two times over we had done a course on film—black film. At that point, Spike was at NYU film school and I would send him stuff. We were close, so I was sending him stuff that I was understanding. We stayed friends, so when Skip Gates invited him up here to teach he said, "Do it with me." So I was going up to Harvard every Friday.

And that's another thing about MIT. MIT allowed me the time away to do that. Barbara Stowe and Fred Gross—Fred Gross initially and then Barbara Stowe—said, "Go ahead, it's part of your professional development." Spike would teach on Fridays. I asked him, I said, "Look Spike, I'm going to get the Glee Club concert to be on a Friday. Why don't you agree to stay over? I know you're busy. Why don't you agree to stay over on a Friday night, come to the concert, and we'll have a big party and gala afterwards?" He said, "Okay."

Boy, we took it. As I said, when I first came on here, our Glee Club concert was breaking even. We've gone from that stage, because Spike agreed to do the gala and because of a guy named John Brown who was up here and has since moved out. We started to engage the corporate community here and ask them to buy ads in the program book. We went from raising or breaking even and sometimes losing money to raising with this past gala seventy-five thousand dollars in that one evening. Now that's not a whole lot of money in the scheme of things at a place like MIT, but to go in five years from zero to seventy-five thousand in one night is a major shift.

Now we have an endowed account with over a hundred thousand dollars in it—two endowed accounts with over a hundred thousand dollars in them—down at Morehouse to go to scholarships, one of which goes to scholarships for people in the Boston area, kids in the Boston area, to go to Morehouse. It has become a major social event in the city. We're in the newspapers and everything like that. We now have thirty corporations that place ads. The packages range from twenty thousand dollars for corporations all the way down to a thousand. We've gotten a lot of profile in this

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community and that's part of what makes me a whole person, and it does fulfill the Morehouse mandate.

Well, it really does, and I know you've been a key person who has really made those activities go. It's interesting how you've developed your skills in such a way that you actually could put it into the community and into your university.

One final question. Being an extraordinary person, there's no question in my mind that you could be whatever you wanted to be—President or whatever—but there's one question that I always try to ask all of you. What advice would you give the young John Wilsons coming up in this day and time out of these colleges and universities, in terms of how to really make it? Essentially, looking back on all the experiences you've had and things you've done, things you are going to do—and the world has changed considerably since you left Morehouse and since you left Philadelphia—when you look back, what advice would you give a young black about surviving and hanging in and doing what he or she wants to do in this world?

What I see in the kids I work with in Bridging Bridges and in the kids I see around on campus here at MIT and the kids I see around my church, I think the biggest issue is fear. I think a lot of people, a lot of young people in particular, are scared of something. They are either scared that they won't be loved or that they won't find love, they're scared that they don't know enough, they're scared that somebody is going to think they're dumb, they're scared because they have enemies, they're scared because they don't think they're going to live a long life, they're scared because they don't think they'll get into a certain college, or because their parents are going to break up or that they've broken up. But it's fear, man, it's fear.

The thing I go to again and again is that you have to strive to be fearless. You have to have some confidence and comfort in this world. Once you have that personal inner sense of comfort or peace, then you can learn anything, you can be anything, you'll have the drive it takes to set a goal and to reach it. A lot of that comes through understanding God, the power of God in your life, that there is a power that is bigger than all of us and stronger than all of us that can help all of us. It's the example of Jesus. A lot of it can come out of religion as theory, but a lot of it can come out of religion as practice.

What that means is that people like Clarence Williams and John Wilson have to engage young kids and understand that every engagement—each and every engagement, almost no matter what we say, because usually what we say is trying to be helpful—reduces that fear. Just by your very interaction, you've given them an example. In most of our interactions we are unwittingly fearless in what we're trying to tell them and in giving them confidence, because we come off with confidence. And they say, "Oh!" I think the way it really translates to them is when they finish with the discussion with people like you and me, they say, "He's not afraid. He has courage. No matter what it's about, he has courage." I don't go there directly, but I'm really keying in on it. Some of my recent experiences were totally about fear.

"Be not afraid," is what I would say. "Don't be afraid. Don't worry. Everything's going to be all right." Should I start preaching? Everything's going to be all right.

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