

## CHARLES M. VEST

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I'm fortunate to have had an altogether positive childhood. I was born in Morgantown, West Virginia. My father was a mathematics professor at West Virginia University for thirty-some years. Prior to that he did a number of things, including being a telephone company lineman and a high-school teacher, but through a series of events he ended up as a mathematics professor. My mother was very much in the mode of the day, a homemaker, but a very intelligent person with a lot of interests—particularly in history—and I think quite well-read. They had both come from the small town of Elkins, West Virginia, so I had the combination of a small-town, small-state background but with a little bit of the academic flavor from day one. That was really a quite wonderful time and place to grow up. We certainly weren't particularly wealthy in the material sense of the word, but I view it as a bright and happy time. We spent most vacations driving around in the middle and southeastern states and occasionally New England, following my mother's history interests—visiting old battlefields and graveyards and places like Williamsburg.

One part of my childhood was in some sense adverse, but I think I somehow drew strength from it. I had very severe allergies as a young kid. They would manifest themselves as severe asthma and bronchitis. There were a couple of episodes in which I had to be taken to Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh. In at least one of those it was quite questionable whether I would make it or not. I think somehow that gave me a lot of stoicism. Eventually I was able to outgrow most of those

Edited and excerpted from an oral history interview conducted by Clarence G. Williams with Charles M. Vest in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 29 August 1996.

allergies and have been able to keep the asthma well under control as an adult.

In my early days I spent a lot of time visiting my parents' little home town of Elkins. My grandfathers were both deceased—one before I was born, the other one the year I was born—but I have good memories of my grandmothers, particularly on my mother's side. My other grandmother lived in New York, and we didn't see her quite as frequently. I spent a lot of summers in Elkins as well. I also remember spending endless hours drawing. That's how I used to entertain myself, particularly when I was sick. I used to love to draw.

*Were there any brothers and sisters?*

Yes, indeed. It was a small family, however. I have one brother, whose name is Marvin. He was about six and a half years older than I am, so we both were and weren't close. That put him out of the house and in college quite a long time before me. Certainly as young kids we very much grew up together. I think I picked up a lot of his interests. He was a good photographer. He too became an engineer, and was to some extent a role model in that sense.

*Speaking of role models, during that period of time—particularly before you went to college—who were the people who were most influential in your life?*

Well, it was a very close-knit family. As I say, the immediate family was small. Even the number of cousins and uncles and aunts was fairly small. I would have to say that my parents were first and foremost my role models and mentors. After I got into school, there were a few memorable teachers. I would have to say that those who probably influenced me most were a couple of science teachers I had. This would probably surprise a lot of people my age, but the first one of those was black. His

name was Mr. Jones. I started off going to segregated schools, as you would expect in a border state area. Schools in West Virginia, as I recall, were just completely desegregated overnight about a year or maybe two before the Supreme Court decision. We were desegregated when I was in junior high school, I forget exactly which grade. Prior to that, there had been all-black high schools and junior high schools. Upon desegregation, teaching staffs were merged. Mr. Jones became my science teacher. There are actually several of us who have gone on to careers in science and engineering, who look back very fondly on him. I say that not because of the particular interview we're having but because it is in fact quite true. I also had an English teacher named Mrs. Hall, in the ninth or tenth grade, who I thought was unusually good and got me quite interested in literature in addition to the things I was doing in science. I've had an interest in science together with history almost from day one.

*Speaking of Mr. Jones, do you recall some of your other memorable interracial contacts early in your life? Could you reflect on those early memories of contact with blacks?*

You mention that, and it's very clear that it has a lot to do with the fact that I remain very optimistic about the long-term possibilities of a relationship between the races in the United States, if we can get ourselves back on track a bit. I remember a lot about those kids who came together in eighth or ninth grade. Prior to that, I certainly grew up in a situation where I saw a lot of black families and people, but as you would expect in that day and age the South was quite segregated. There was a section of town in which the vast majority of the black folks lived. We happened to live very close to that up until the time I was about five years old. So I saw lots of black people, but didn't really know them until our schools were desegregated.

The kids who came together in my class were, for whatever reason, an extraordinary bunch. I can still tell you who some of them are and what they're doing. We all got along extremely well. In retrospect, I look back today and I'm not sure why it worked so smoothly, but we are pretty good friends. Two of the guys I can think of are now in higher education, both in universities back in West Virginia. One young woman I haven't seen for

years, but I know what she's been doing. Another extraordinarily talented young man grew up very poor, literally in a converted chicken coop, but had extraordinary talent for art and went on to university and art school. I've lost track of him, but it was, for whatever reason, a happy time and we all seemed to get along pretty well. I'm not saying that overnight we were completely and totally and emotionally integrated, but there was very little hatred and divisiveness and we did seem to pal around quite a bit. I know that, ten or twenty years later, that same town and school I attended was full of the tension and turmoil and bitterness that developed in so many places. But from my point of view, it was a very positive experience. Of course, it may be that if you went back and interviewed some of those kids, they might have a very different view of it.

*The decision to go to West Virginia University, how did that come about? You stayed in-state.*

Well, in some sense my sights might not have been raised as high as they should have been, although I've been very pleased with how everything has worked out over time. I think I got a quite good education there, actually. There were a lot of dedicated and devoted teachers. I had no complaints at all about my undergraduate education. Frankly, it was just an accepted thing that that's where I would go. My brother had gone there; as I said, my father was teaching there. This was before the days of offices of financial aid. I don't think we even thought about applying to private schools.

It was a different time and place, but I was very pleased. I had quite a good high school education. My undergraduate education, while weak in spots, was good. I headed off to graduate school after that at Michigan. There was a professor—he says I give him all the blame, but I actually give him all the credit—at West Virginia named Bob Slonneger. He was in mechanical engineering. He more than anybody was responsible for my studying mechanical engineering. He really was very much a mentor all the way through college and, in fact, is still around.

*What would be your reflection on your contact and relationship with black students during your undergraduate days?*

Well, I must admit that was much more minimal than my high-school experience. As far as I know, the university had had black students for a long,

long time—I think, like MIT, back in its early history. But the numbers, I'm sure, were not large at all. For the most part, those few blacks I knew in college were kids who had come with me from high school into the university.

There were some firsts. The athletic teams were just beginning to be desegregated at that point. In fact, the brother of one of my high school friends was the first black football player at West Virginia. He was a very good one. I think the bigger change for me was that university was my first opportunity to really get to know a lot of students from other countries. I can remember developing friends from foreign countries, much more than with American blacks. The number of blacks was pretty darn small. We did have a couple of establishments in the town that remained segregated at that time, even though legally they weren't supposed to be. While I was far from a radical student, I was involved in leading some protests to those two places and eventually they were desegregated. One of them was a bar. I remember we met with the president of the university to tell him we had to figure out how to get this place desegregated. His answer was that he wished they discriminated against everybody and didn't let any students go there! But those weren't his last words. He was very supportive of our efforts.

*You left West Virginia University in 1963 and went to Michigan. Contrast that with your experiences at West Virginia, certainly in terms of your reflection on the black experience.*

First of all, in a two-week period I graduated, was married, went on a honeymoon, and started graduate school. I kind of barreled along very rapidly. I went to graduate school and studied extremely hard in my specialty. I led a much more focused life with a lot narrower social contact than I had had in my undergraduate years. There certainly was at that point in time—1963—a somewhat larger minority presence at Michigan than there had been at West Virginia, but really not dramatically so. Again, there was a great range of diversity in terms of foreign students. Several of my very closest friends came from other countries. Really my involvement with racial matters at Michigan would come later, after I became a faculty member; I was focused on completing my degree.

There was, however, a lot of very serious protest activity and movements on campus during

the late '60s and early '70s. Tom Hayden and his colleagues had founded the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Michigan just before I came there. So many things got mixed together in those years—the counter-culture movement, Vietnam war protests, all kinds of incidents over drugs and so forth. It was a pretty radicalized campus. To be perfectly honest, I don't remember much about those months while I was a student. But about the time I was an assistant professor, there was created on the campus something called BAM—Black Action Movement. By the way, Shirley Jackson tells me her sister was a leading member of this, and we've had a lot of talk about it. I was generally supportive of this movement—up to a point. I felt that it used some tactics that I didn't care for. There were times in which things got a bit out of hand and, I think, became very counter-productive. But within the engineering school, where I was involved, this was really a time in which people began facing the issue of race. I can remember classes being disrupted and so forth. A rough equivalent of OME was formed at this time, led by a guy I still keep in good contact with, a fine young man named Keith Cooley, who was finishing his graduate studies in nuclear engineering and who led that organization for many years.

There was a lot of change. The interesting thing was that while the campus was quite disrupted and lots of rhetoric went on in the arts and sciences, really the engineering school was a group that rolled up its sleeves and said, "Let's actually do something about this." I think they set themselves on a vector pretty much like that of MIT and stayed on it quite well ever since. Engineers had been involved at first in minor ways, and later on in major ways, with outreach activities and support groups and so forth for minority students on campus. But most of that, as I say, occurred after I finished my Ph.D. I was essentially off in a corner of my laboratory for the four or five years of graduate study.

*You ended up at Michigan moving into administration. In fact, when you look back at your career so far, in that particular period you held a number of key positions up to the provost, which means that you had a major view of actions in the whole area of race relations. Could you talk a little bit about things that you thought were positive—things that went well while you were in these*

*administrative positions, things you learned, and things that you reflect on now that you feel were very valuable to you in terms of your present position?*

I'd like to try to answer that on two planes. First of all, some of the things I've already told you about, particularly regarding high school and regarding my experience about the time I was finishing my Ph.D. and becoming a faculty member. In both of those periods, I had had close black friends and colleagues and people I knew well. I think that has always given me a combination of great optimism, but also some sense of realism. One of the things that I learned the most from was working with one of my first Ph.D. students. He was an African-American student named Ronald Boyd. He is a faculty member at Prairie View right now, having previously been at Sandia Laboratories for awhile. This was in the '70s. When you work with doctoral students in science or engineering, you actually get to know them extremely well because it's a partnership. Ron was a Tuskegee graduate who had come to Michigan to earn his Ph.D. That was probably the first time I got a real day-to-day insight into the tough psychological tensions and pressures on black students, particularly in that time. That was certainly a part of my education.

Later, I came to be very close to a few other black colleagues—for example, Anne Monterio, who ran the Minority Engineering Program Office; and also Retaugh Dumas, who was dean of the nursing school at the time I was dean of engineering and later provost. These people were absolutely open in discussion and gave me new insights. On the positive side, particularly after I got into administration as associate dean and as dean of the engineering school, I worked with various minority outreach and education programs, attending the functions and supporting activities. It was always fun. In engineering, this was an upbeat activity. The kids were inspired and inspiring. I think, for the most part, the engineering school was a very good environment for them, although certainly not perfect. For the most part, it was viewed positively.

My education took its next leap, I suppose, when I became provost. I learned a little bit when I was dean, just as a dean at MIT would. I then found that when I got over into the large departments in the social sciences and the liberal arts, the attitudes were very different—much more

political on both sides, and much more hard-edged. We had a lot of influence on the campus from various political, religious, and other groups. They would be based in Detroit and come to campus and participate in sit-ins. It was a very different environment and a very tough one. While it was extremely important, feeling a sense of making headway and contributions was a little harder to come by. I have to tell you, though, that one of my memories I am fondest of is that when I left for MIT I got a very long, wonderful e-mail from a black student who had been in a lot of confrontational situations with me. I always thought he would have had no respect for me whatsoever, but I got a wonderful e-mail from him saying, "You probably don't understand this, but you're the person I really want to be like." That just meant an enormous amount to me. I've never forgotten it.

So I've had quite a mix of experiences. Just as on the MIT campus, we had a long struggle to promote diversity. Frankly, we were able to make more headway at Michigan in terms of numbers of minority faculty hired, because of the size and breadth of subjects covered. I give great credit to Jim Duderstadt, who was president at that time. More people are available when you have such a broad range of fields. Michigan has seventeen schools. The struggles within science and engineering, however, were very much as they are here at MIT. So, in a strict numerical sense, we were able to make more headway on faculty in some areas, but the student body there has never really taken on quite the level of diversity that we have here at MIT. We were able to do a little more on the faculty at Michigan, but not as well overall on the student end.

*It's amazingly different from MIT. From your perspective, has that created a different kind of challenge?*

It is a very different situation. Thinking back on what I said just a moment ago, I don't want to be misunderstood. Michigan has become one of the great producers of African-American Ph.D.'s in the country—very strong progress. But if you analyze it, there are great disparities from field to field, and the overall student body is not as diverse as ours. There is a real difference in an institution with thirty-five thousand students and one with ten thousand. One of the biggest differences—and students both ask me and talk about it a lot here,

because many of them know my background—is that, in a way that I did not fully understand until I left, big-time athletics plays a very central role. Michigan students are not rabid sports fans; in fact, they have a tendency to take it with a grain of salt. But it's a focal point in bringing everybody together. Thousands of students tramp up to the stadium every Saturday for football. There's a bit more camaraderie, a greater sense of community and commonality of experience across the undergraduates. In some ways, the students are much more socially oriented. Their experience is excellent, but not as intense as here at MIT, and there is a much greater *range* of academic preparation and quality in the student body. You take the top five or ten percent of Michigan students and they'll look as good as the top five or ten percent of MIT students, but the range is much greater.

So the two, on balance, are a lot different. Michigan houses only its freshmen in dormitories and then maybe a third or so of the sophomores and then almost none above that. I think in many ways the freshmen and sophomores and the juniors and seniors aren't living together as nicely as they are here at MIT. The culture of students here, as you know, is very unique. Particularly at the undergraduate level, the two experiences are very different. At the graduate level, the experience is more similar. Students are focused on their department or laboratory, and they come from a wide range of undergraduate institutions. So the graduate student culture here is more similar, I think, to that at Michigan than is the undergraduate experience.

*By the way, I just saw the latest edition of the U.S. News and World Report, where MIT is ranked number one in engineering and Michigan is ranked, I think, about fifth.*

Well, that makes seven years in a row. We've been fortunate to be number one every year they've done it.

*I would like to ask for your impressions of MIT when you decided to come to MIT as our leader. What really surprised you, in your first year or two, that was different than what you thought it was going to be? Embedded in that, of course, are issues of the black experience, issues of diversity.*

More than anything else, I was amazed by what a friendly and open place MIT is. Much of the outside world has an image of us as being kind of

cold, hard, and gray, but both Becky and I are astounded at how open and friendly people are. I say this with a bit of trepidation, but by comparison to other campuses I know through various professional connections, it's really not a very political campus in the sense of "campus politics." Politics exists, but on the whole people here are so proud of—and so dedicated to—their work and to being the best in the world at whatever they do, that by and large they don't have time to waste on things that really aren't very important to them.

That's my sense of MIT. I must say I just enormously appreciate this characteristic of the Institute. We have our own pressures and intensities, but for the most part people here at MIT have their values and priorities straight. I don't by any means imply that people don't make their views known—just the opposite. Everybody is very straightforward. If people don't like what you're saying or doing, they simply tell you about it. They do it in a straightforward way. Arguments and decisions are generally made on sound intellectual grounds. There's a lot of mutual respect in people, whether they agree with your views or not. I think this is something really to be proud of.

The second thing that just leaps out at you, and I didn't think of it so much as a shock coming in as I do when I now leave and visit other campuses, is just walking down the hallways and observing the diversity of our students. I'm used to seeing this day-in and day-out, and think nothing about it. Then I visit another campus and think, "Boy, this doesn't look the same as MIT." Despite all the other problems we've had in achieving diversity goals, our undergraduate student body is something we really should be proud of in an institution that's eighty-five percent science and engineering.

*You have made history in one sense. Since Karl T. Compton in the '30s, you are the first president to come from the outside. The faculty, which really governs the institution in a way, had to be a group that you had to persuade to accept your leadership. How would you express your achievement in this regard, and in terms of the fiscal issues that face the Institute?*

I think you raised two issues. One was acceptance of an outsider by the faculty, and the second was marshaling the forces to get our financial house in order. What I am most grateful to the MIT faculty

for is that they have given me the benefit of the doubt. People at MIT look you in the eye and try to decide whether you are contributing and achieving things professionally or not. Unlike the very difficult experiences of some new presidents coming to other campuses, I had an altogether positive experience. Faculty colleagues did not start off with the idea that this guy is from the outside and he's not going to know what's going on. I'm very grateful for that. The same is true for the staff and every other part of our community. I did spend a period of almost two months, before I initially took office, interviewing faculty and administrators informally. I was able to learn a lot, mostly to form some perceptions and understanding. If I hadn't done that, it would have been much more difficult.

In terms of coming to grips with our financial problems and the reengineering activities that we've taken on, I believe that those remain very controversial. Not everybody agrees with the way we went about this. I think I have been successful in getting almost everybody here to understand what the long-term liabilities of the institution are in this period of change if we don't come to grips with them. I had thought that I had to be very honest in solving problems. I've tried to be consistent in the way I've approached those on every segment of the campus. I think there are, in fact, a lot of people who are critical of the way we're doing it, but we are making headway. I believe that over the next year or two we will have to produce some successes that are demonstrable and understandable. I'm confident that will be the case. Once that begins to happen, I think that everybody will come around. Simultaneously with approaching the difficult side, of course, we must recognize the opportunities that we have. I'm going to try and put some emphasis on that this year.

*I ask that question because I've interviewed a couple of people I've known for over twenty years here. They have been very critical. They are people who speak their minds, the kind of people you described earlier. They talk straight with you. One of the things that happened shortly after you came here, we had a black faculty member sit outside the president's door to demonstrate his concern about black issues. He made the point when I interviewed him that he had a great deal of respect for the way you handled it. He has been a very tough guy in many respects over the years relative to the administration. I also talked*

*to another person, Professor Manning, who speaks very highly of you as our leader. So those are just two cases. There have been others, but again the reflection of what you've said in terms of your experiences may have a lot to do with how you've approached these issues. It has come across as not being threatening, but how can we help each other to do something?*

I am very honored to hear that. In fact, I have to tell you that the first faculty member you referred to made a comment about me in the preface of his new textbook. That probably means more to me than anything else that's happened to me since I came here. I know that he has had a difficult road in many dimensions in life. I know that he's one of the most talented teachers at MIT. I don't want to sound sentimental about this, but I think you just have to be open with people and I do try to listen as well as talk. I think that in terms of minority issues at least, everybody understands what my goals are, even though I'm sometimes mystified about how to actually get there. I do just try to accept every human being as an individual and try to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. Anybody who is here at MIT, a student or faculty member or staff member, is good. All our people are valuable in some dimension. When people are dissatisfied, you have to disentangle it and understand it. Even if you can't resolve it, you can let people know that you are listening and that you understand and are at least trying to resolve the issues that trouble them, whatever they are.

*In the current legislative climate and with the public mood leaning against affirmative action, where do you stand on this increasingly controversial issue? How would you like to see the legislation shaped or modified? How would you like to see people think about these issues, particularly as they relate to MIT?*

I'd really like to start with your last point. What worries me now more than anything—and, in fact, I'm in the process of writing a little bit about this—is that I really feel that as a nation we are losing the goal. I don't mind people differing on how you achieve a goal, but I feel that we don't have a consensus on a way to solve it—that however you get there, what you really need to have is a truly equal, well integrated society. By integrated, I mean a society where everybody really does have an equal shot at accomplishing things and realizing the opportunities in America. If I thought we agreed

on the goal, then I could be much more tolerant of philosophical perspectives about how to get there. There's the liberal view that holds that a strong, federally enforced affirmative action program is the necessary mode. There's a more conservative perspective—that, by the way, is advocated by many African-American scholars as well as by whites—that might say No, we just have to have equal access for everybody, and affirmative action is wrong because it's reverse discrimination. We could have, I think, much more sensible debates about which path to follow and how to get there, if we all at least agreed on the goal.

While I told you that on the whole I'm an optimist, the one thing that worries me is that I am fearful that we're backing off of this commitment. A new generation is coming on with a very different perspective, not having lived through and understood the civil rights movement and so forth. If we lose the goal, many things will be lost. We have to work to move away from that. Speaking personally, and in a way that maybe isn't shared by a lot of people, I think we just have an historical imperative and a moral imperative. We need a nation that is truly diverse and that continues to offer real opportunity for everybody. That's my personal point of view. But even if you set idealism and historical context aside, everybody needs to understand the realities of this country and of its future. The irony is that we already are a remarkably diverse nation, and over the period of the next generation we're going to become even more diverse, particularly in terms of race. The work force is rapidly approaching the point where most of the entrants won't be the traditional white male like myself; we'll be in the minority. These are facts, yet people talk about it as if it's something abstract. It's not abstract. Coupled with that, we have an aging population, which means that we're going to have more and more older people, all of whom will be more and more dependent on a shrinking fraction of the population that is of working age. Those of working age will have to support themselves and the retirees, and they're going to have to compete in a very intense global marketplace. If we can't establish a cohesive society that can draw on the talents of all people, we will be in trouble. Regardless of what your political orientation or your values or ideals are, we all must realize that we're going to need a cohesive, working society which is by definition diverse.

I start with that perspective. I'm very worried about the current trends. Now, let's consider the dominant issue as far as colleges and universities are concerned—admissions. How do you set your admissions policy? What do you do with affirmative action? When I use the term affirmative action, I try to use it very broadly. In fact, I prefer to say “acting affirmatively.” Affirmative action, particularly on the federal level, has taken on a sort of bureaucratic, red-tape oriented, and sometimes very artificial nature that often gets in the way as much as it helps. I don't want to defend all of these programs across the board, but I do accept the spirit—which is that it requires a conscious effort to get to the point where everybody has acquired opportunity in this country. Since the Bakke case at the University of California back in the '70s, the legal context of admissions has been that race can be considered as “one of many factors”—I think that's a literal quote—that we can consider when we admit students. That is a perfectly good context as far as MIT is concerned because we see our role as both to serve society and to create the optimal education for our students. We see our role as selecting from a group of extraordinarily talented young men and women, to build a class that has a lot of variety across the board—geographically, economically, internationally, racially, culturally, and so forth—and to create a group that can learn from each other and that will strengthen itself through that experience. The one thing our students have in common is that they're all bright and well motivated. We do literally consider race as one among many factors. But during this last year, there has been a potentially disastrous court decision in federal court in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi that suddenly, due to a challenge over admission to law school at the University of Texas, decreed that public universities in that district cannot consider race in admissions, period. Race cannot be a factor in the admissions decision. If that spirit propagates and becomes applicable to education across the country, it will have very negative consequences for the future of this country.

I do have to admit that I am worried at the moment about these two things—first, that we're going to lose the ultimate goal, and second, that the courts and possibly the Congress are going to begin defining and constraining us so narrowly that we will not be able, as I say, to act affirmatively, to take those steps that I believe are still necessary

to get to the point where we have real equality. As you well know, all you have to do is look through any compilation of statistics on salaries, job probabilities, crime, anything, and you will see that statistically we still are very separate groups in this country.

*How would you assess the racial climate at MIT overall? How does it compare with other universities where you have worked, particularly the University of Michigan? You've partly answered that in a way, I think, but I want to ask it more directly. How would you gauge the racial climate on this campus?*

My experience is an unusual one. I'm looking at it as president of the institution and that always runs the risk of being decoupled from some of the realities, but also gives you a different perspective. On a relative basis—that is, comparing MIT to other campuses—I think our racial relations are extraordinarily good. Having said that, I do not mean that they are perfect, that they are what they need to be. It is sometimes difficult for me to gauge whether they are improving or getting worse. It is still an area that we have to pay very direct attention to, and particularly among our students. I do know that there are students who come here from various minority groups—and from some other backgrounds, by the way—who do not feel that they have the positive, open experience that I really want for all of our students. This is something we have to continue to understand. We have to understand the differences in success rates that occur among various groups, we have to put ourselves into the other person's shoes, and we have to keep listening. The reason I believe we have good relations, at least on a relative basis, really flows from this kind of openness and honesty. I think we “let it all hang out.” When there's a problem, we know about it and people tend to react in somewhat less emotional terms than on other campuses.

I don't want to be misunderstood. I know there are some tough experiences. You and I are in the process of setting some of the guidelines on this right now. We've got a way to go, but I think we're approaching it a little more honestly and I think that overall relations are pretty good. We just all have to keep working to make them even better.

*There's one other question that I want to come back to, and that is the whole issue regarding the recruitment and retention of black faculty. Despite a lot of effort that we've made to try to increase the number, what is your analy-*

*sis of the fact that we still have not made significant progress?*

If we look at the three primary components of the academic core of the Institute—undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty—I've already expressed my pride in what we've accomplished at the undergraduate level. If we can just keep improving the environment so that everybody's success rates and comfort levels—if that's the right word—are equal, we'll be getting close to our goal. Among the graduate students, I believe that we are making slow progress. Historically, we have some very great successes to be proud of. We are viewed both in terms of the education of minority Ph.D's and of women Ph.D's as being important pioneers. One of the things that keep my spirits high when I get out to national meetings is to see some of the remarkable women and minority scholars around the country who have their origins at MIT. The numbers aren't huge but, boy, are they people to be reckoned with.

When we come to the faculty, frankly the word I use is “failure.” I think that any word much short of that isn't right. I am very disappointed. We have at least kept the gradient in the right direction. During the years that I have been here, continuing the work of Paul Gray, we have very slowly had a net increase in the number of faculty in almost every category of minorities and women. Women have been moving much more rapidly, but I am not at all comfortable with where we are. I do honestly believe that particularly over the past four years we have seen an increase in real effort on the part of our faculty to consider the importance of women and minorities in the overall life of the Institute. We have been making more offers. Frankly, over the last two years we've begun to improve a little in terms of the acceptances of those offers. So we are making progress. I think we have some increase in commitment at the level of deans and most of the department heads, but as a whole I feel that I really haven't succeeded in getting it high enough on everyone's priority list. I get some comfort in that I think it is improving, the commitment is improving, but I hope that in the follow-through of the faculty retirement program we had this year, we will make substantially more such hires. We have some nice success stories this year and I hope we can make progress, but I still publicly use the word “failure” in terms of where we are right now with regard to minority



faculty. I would not use that strong a term regarding women faculty, although we haven't made enough progress in certain areas there as well. I consider myself during the remaining years of my presidency as very much on the line. I don't want to leave office without having made a significant difference in the diversity of our faculty.

Why is it difficult? Many reasons. First of all, the number of Ph.D's graduated annually in the U.S. in most of the core areas of the Institute is extraordinarily small. That's why, for the long-term benefit not only of MIT but of academia as a whole, we have to focus a lot of our energy on improvement of our graduate programs. That's the only way the problem will be solved in the long run. In the short term, the numbers are small but there are some very high-quality faculty candidates available each year. To attract them, we must maintain one-on-one personal contact with our colleagues around the country and with these individuals as they're coming up through the graduate schools. We must roll up our sleeves and continue to do that. We have some faculty at MIT with great devotion to doing this, and others who don't pay much attention to it.

As you know, we talk to a lot of minority faculty—some who have come here, some who have declined our offers. As with any other human beings, each one has an individual story. Very few of the declinations, I honestly believe, were because they didn't like MIT or weren't treated right. It's usually something very personal that attracted them elsewhere. But I still have the feeling that we do not, to some of these candidates, obviously offer enough of a community of their minority compatriots that gives them the underlying sense that it would be easy to make a transition to MIT. There is close to zero hostility or anything openly negative; for the most part, minority people are welcomed to the faculty, but there's just not a critical mass, particularly department by department. I hope we can build a broader commitment to diversity as a key goal in building the faculty for the future. We also must pay particular attention to the sense of community and belonging that we can provide to all people. This sense is largely here once you're settled and located, but if I try to put myself in the shoes of someone else, I would look around and not see a very large minority presence. That's got to be a factor.

It's going to take very dedicated and hard work, but we have one excellent asset—one thing that no other institution can compare with—and that is the extraordinary group of students we have at MIT. Students will continue to be our best recruiting tool. I'm not despondent and not terribly discouraged, but I do feel that we still haven't forged the strength of commitment we really need. Doing so will continue to be a high priority over these next few years.