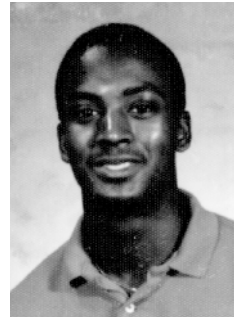


CLARENCE G. WILLIAMS, JR.

BA 1989 (social studies) Wesleyan University, SM 1994 (management) MIT; operations analyst, Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency, 1990-1992; senior financial analyst, Operations and Technology Division, Pitney Bowes Inc., and business analyst, Pitney Bowes Credit Corp., 1994-1997; client service officer and investment associate, New Amsterdam Partners, LLC, 1997-1998; assistant vice president, Trust Company of the West, New York, 1999- ; board member, New York chapter, National Association of Securities Professionals; field assignments with Coro Foundation Leadership Development Program, 1989-1990; secretary, Wesleyan Black Alumni Council, 1990-1992.



Talk a little bit about your experience as a son of a black administrator at MIT, growing up very much on the campus, and quite often being there.

I, along with my brother Alton, did basically grow up on the campus. We came to the Boston area in the early '70s—1972, if I remember correctly. In many ways, the Institute represents, at least to me, a very critical part of my social development. I can remember as an adolescent going up to Woodstock, Vermont, with both my mother and my father, other black administrators, and students, to spend a retreat weekend. That was something very unique for us to be able to do at a very young age, to go and experience that with other people who obviously are very intelligent, very bright, and very capable of doing outstanding things. I think that having the opportunity to be in those kinds of arenas made me always want to succeed and to do the best that I could.

Another related point to that is that by having those types of experiences, going to college was always something that I had assumed I would do. The question was where. The other thing about MIT is that I went to the day camp there for a number of years and had the chance to interact with mainly kids of faculty members and other administrators on the campus. That was good, too. In many situations, my brother and I were the only black students—or black campers, I should say—but I think that it was good because we got a chance to interact with different young people.

The other thing, too, is that I ended up going to a private school in Cambridge. I can remember being a seventh- and eighth-grader, catching the

bus back to MIT to come home with my father. I think that instilled a sense of independence in me in terms of being able to go to that school and being able to compete in an environment where you had a lot of kids whose parents were professors and business people and, in many cases, very wealthy. I think all of that has a direct relationship to what my father has done at the Institute for close to three decades and how I've been able to develop into a productive citizen.

Not to get too long-winded, but there are a lot of different things that I think went on in my upbringing that were very positive in terms of being around that type of educational environment. One was seeing how the Institute recognized Martin Luther King's birthday. A lot of that is a direct result of my father, who has held several positions at the Institute and has been put in situa-



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tions where he has had to develop programs. That was definitely one of them, where people would come from all over the country to speak during a program dedicated to Dr. King's holiday. This has been going on for a number of years and involves people marching from the main campus over to Kresge Auditorium in a symbolic gesture of the type of civil rights activities that went on in the '60s, and which have a direct relationship to the black presence at MIT to this day and to the work that my father is doing in putting together this book. Hearing people like Jerome Holland, Helen G. Edmonds, Leon Higginbotham, just to name a few, coming and giving presentations and speeches, was a real great opportunity for me as a young person growing up, seeing all these people who are distinguished in their fields coming to MIT to recognize Dr. King. Those types of things, I think, really were instrumental in my development.

Another thing I'll say is that when I was in middle school at Buckingham, Browne & Nichols, I was able to improve my math skills with the help of a tutor from MIT who was someone I could look up to as a real science and math scholar. His name was Bill Marable. Again, being in a situation interacting with very intelligent and outstanding young black people was just as important as whatever they were working with me on. I always felt that because of those types of interactions, it enabled me to be a better student. In many respects, I think that because of that interaction it always made me want to give back in whatever way I could. To give an example of that quite briefly is my participation in the Upward Bound program, which is run by MIT and Wellesley. I was a math teacher for three summers in that program. There's a direct relationship between me doing that and obviously the work that I did with Dr. Marable. All of that, I think, is a very big part of my development into the person I am today.

Talk about some of the best experiences you've had at MIT and also some of the worst experiences you've had connected with MIT.

Clearly, one of the best experiences was graduating from the MIT Sloan School of Management in 1994 and going up to get my diploma in front of an audience at Killian Court, where my father was sitting as a faculty member and administrator behind the dais. My mother was there as well, and also Dr. Paul Gray, someone who has always been very supportive of my brother and me in terms of

what we have been doing with ourselves. That clearly represents a culmination of a lot of investment that my parents put in me and my brother, who finished as an undergraduate in 1991. I would also say that is probably one of the most significant and positive things about being associated with that school. It's kind of ironic that both of us ended up getting a degree there. I would be interested to know from an archival standpoint if that's ever happened before, because that is significant. We both were able to go through that place and graduate in the time allotted, and that's significant.

I would say that those are probably the two most positive experiences that I've had connected with that school, along with some of the things that I've already mentioned. I mentioned being a teacher in the Upward Bound program. That clearly was a good opportunity for me—to work with that program, work with the administrators of that program, Ron Crichlow and Evette Layne, report to them, and have a manager who is a person of color. All that was very positive. Related to my graduating from the Sloan School, the chance to interact with Professor William Qualls was also very positive for me. As an African-American professor at that school, he is someone who always had an open-door policy in terms of just talking with students, regardless of who they are. He certainly opened up his door to me and was always supportive of the black students in that situation. I would definitely include that as one of the positive aspects of being involved with or having a relationship with MIT.

I guess another point I'll make is that being able to interact with Dr. Mary Rowe was very significant for me. As a student and beyond as a professional, I took a course with her on negotiations. I think I benefited from that course immensely, and it certainly has helped me in terms of my professional development to this day. I would definitely rank that as a very significant part of my experience.

The other thing I definitely need to mention is the conference that my father put together with John Turner, I guess it was 1982 and '84, which dealt with the issues facing black administrators on predominantly white campuses. That was a conference that was in many ways revolutionary. Nothing like that had been done on such a large scale and certainly nothing like that had been done at a university setting like MIT. It set the framework for a

lot of development at other universities and, if I might add, led to the creation of several publications that are still on the market to this day, which I will not name. It was because of that event during a period in this country's history that you really began to see from a structural standpoint how universities had dealt with the issue of inclusion and different paradigms in terms of how to adjust and create environments that allow for excellence for black students, professors, and administrators. It was definitely a revolutionary event and something that obviously played a major role in my own development and understanding, beyond the issue of race to how institutions function.

Talk a little bit about growing up in Newton, and also about some of the role models and mentors who have been helpful in your career thus far.

Clearly, both of my parents are the primary people who have been instrumental in my development. The reason I say that is that they have always sought to provide my brother and me with the very best. That shouldn't be taken lightly because of the fact of where they came from. Both of them grew up in North Carolina in the segregated South, basically from the early '40s on up. They experienced the "white-only" and "colored" water fountains and all those types of institutional factors that had been built in that suggested racial inferiority. For them to live through that, to go to a historically black college and university, to get master's degrees, and to migrate up North, and wind up at the premier institute of science and technology, definitely qualifies them as inspirational people to look up to. So I start with them first and foremost.

I think that I clearly have grown up in a predominantly white setting and the majority of my time has been in predominantly white settings. I think that in spite of that, there have been numerous opportunities, many of which were created through my father's involvement with MIT, to interact with other people of color. In terms of some individuals whom I recall as being instrumental beyond my immediate family and parents, one involves my elementary school experience at the Oak Hill School in Newton Center, Massachusetts. Right off the bat, that was instrumental because of the fact that the principal was black, Sam Turner. He's someone who grew up in Newton himself, who was a teacher in the Newton public school system—probably one of the first

black teachers in the Newton public school system—and rose to be a principal in a quite affluent area of Newton, which is a testament to his own character and integrity and intellect. So right off the bat, my brother and I—as a five-year-old, as a six-year-old—saw a person of color in charge. There was never any mystery, wondering if that was possible, because I saw it at an early age. He was someone who was very instrumental.

I had several teachers in that school who also took a special interest in me, as well as in my brother. One is Dorothy Mims, who taught me as a second- and third-grader, and also taught my brother. Another is my first-grade teacher, Ron Stec, who was very supportive, and Bernard Plovnick, who was also supportive while I was in that school and whom I recently talked to. Another is a woman, Arlene Fair, a math teacher who encouraged me to get involved with the school store and who encouraged me to come and get help after school if there was something I didn't understand. They were very, very instrumental people. Another gentleman, Gary Furst, who wasn't my teacher but was my brother's teacher, was also very supportive. Almost all the teachers there were supportive. I think I had a very positive elementary school experience. Another social studies teacher, Mr. McDonald, was very supportive, as was Miss Curtin, who I also had, and Miss Burns. I can honestly say that from an elementary school standpoint you couldn't ask for a better place to go to school.

As I said, I grew up in a white neighborhood, but Newton was one of the many communities that participated in the Metco program, which involved students from Boston coming to attend school in Newton. I thought that was very good for me, because it provided other students of color in the environment and because I think it gave everybody a sense of community, since housing patterns in this country have traditionally been so segregated.

As I alluded to before, I went to Buckingham, Browne & Nichols (BB&N) starting in the seventh grade, and that was a very interesting environment. I'm glad I went to that school, but I definitely can say that it was an adjustment in terms of the work and the volume of work that was assigned. It was a private school and it sort of had some of the flavor or aura of what all that represents. There weren't many black students in that

school. The middle school had barely a hundred students, and there were probably four or five blacks when I was there in that school. So that was different off the bat. In terms of teachers who were very supportive, one was Mr. Bowman, who actually was a science teacher and ended up going to the upper school. In terms of other people, there was a receptionist—Miss Hilliard—who although she wasn't a teacher, was someone who was always available to just say hello to, to talk, whose own daughter was in the school in my class, just very down-to-earth people. I always welcomed and appreciated the interaction. Those are pretty much the people I can recall right at the moment.

I'll move on to the high school, since I feel that that was more of a developmental experience for me. Clearly, if we just focus on individuals in that BB&N environment, Daniel Farber, my English teacher as a freshman and who I would continue to stay with as my advisor, was one of the most influential individuals at that school and beyond for me personally. I certainly think that having him as an English teacher enabled me to develop into a fairly decent writer. He was someone I could always talk to about issues related to race in that school or issues related to whatever I was interested in doing in that school, or just talk in general. He had that kind of policy with all his students. He definitely is someone I consider to be very instrumental in my development.

Another individual is Peter Amershadian, who is no longer at the school but taught French when I was there. He was someone I got along with to the extent that I asked him to be the faculty advisor for a cultural awareness group that I founded at the school. Nothing like that had ever been done before at BB&N. It was a situation where I saw a need to have the cultural diversity of the school—religious, ethnic, and racial—recognized in a way where people could learn and it be an educational experience. He was someone who was very supportive of the idea, being Armenian himself and growing up in Watertown, which has historically had a significant Armenian population. He was in sync with the need to recognize cultures in the world at BB&N. He too was someone who was very influential in my development at that school.

There were many other people who I think very highly of at BB&N. One is the former headmaster, Peter Gunness, who was supportive of me

in terms of the things that I was involved with in that school. Even when I graduated and was in college, he was supportive of a thesis project that involved surveying private schools in Massachusetts. He basically threw his support in the form of a letter to close to twenty or thirty private schools, requesting that they allow me to come in and interview teachers, students, and administrators. If it hadn't been for that type of endorsement, I don't think I would have made the progress that I did on that thesis. He didn't have to do that. That's significant from that standpoint. Another thing that's significant about his support is that he also recommended me for a Rhodes Scholarship, even though, while I did get the endorsement from the university, I wasn't accepted. Yet he gave his support, which was significant.

Again, a lot of individuals come to mind. Among people who also stand out, one is Mr. Ellinghaus, whom I got to know as a crew coach. He was very supportive of me getting into that sport, pushing me to excel in that sport, and just being a good friend in general. He was a very good person and always very supportive of me. Another person, also in the crew environment, was Mr. Putnam—again, someone who encouraged me to do well in that sport and always treated me fairly. You couldn't ask for two better people in that environment. Another individual who, I guess, really was responsible for college placement, was Hamilton Clark. He was someone with definitely a lot of integrity and always pushed hard for kids to present themselves favorably in the college admissions circle and definitely did so in my case, and also was my crew coach. He was someone who was always very honorable and very supportive of what I was trying to do.

Another woman who I think was very supportive was Mrs. Whitlock, who when I was a freshman in that school always was available to talk in an advisory role, and was very supportive in the things that I was doing. My art teachers, John Norton and Gina Halpern, were always very encouraging in developing and building on my artistic skills which I seemed to always have at an early age. Getting into pottery and drawing and painting, those were some things that they also supported and pushed me on as well. In fact, if I remember correctly, John Norton and Gina Halpern made sure that some of my work was displayed at a school art exhibit. That was something

that was very significant as well. They did not have to do that. I look back at my experience in that art department as extremely positive.

In hindsight, even though she wasn't directly involved with my secondary school experience at BB&N, Beth Jacobson was someone who was always very encouraging and has been a good friend beyond BB&N. She's very prominent in the development office at Browne & Nichols, and has always made an effort to keep up with me and what I'm doing since graduating from BB&N in '85. So I've given a laundry list of people. I don't think I've left anybody out. But again, I think that BB&N overall was a very good experience. I think that I gained something from that environment and I also think that I gave something back to that environment. Because of the people who I've mentioned, I think that's why that occurred. I should also mention that I was the co-president of the student body, which was an elected position where my peers chose me to be in that role. It was the second time that that had been achieved by a person of African descent, to my knowledge. So again, I think that's significant. Also, at graduation I was given an award, the Barrett Hoyt Award for, I guess, exhibiting qualities of citizenship. That was something that certainly was a very unique award to be given. So overall, I think that BB&N was a positive experience for me.

I'll move along in terms of at least talking about Wesleyan. Wesleyan was a good experience for me. A few individuals come to mind, at least on the faculty and administrative and athletic level, whom I should highlight. One is Dean Young, who is no longer at Wesleyan. He's someone who always had an open-door policy and was very receptive and interested in my development at Wesleyan. My thesis advisor, Marshall Hyatt, was also someone. My crew coach, Will Scoggins, was important. Professor William Lowe, who has written recommendations for me beyond Wesleyan, taught a course—history of Afro-American music—that was very influential in my development and my thinking.

I was a College of Social Studies major at Wesleyan. That was a very challenging major, particularly in your sophomore year when you had to do a lot of reading and a lot of writing. The first year was definitely a challenge for me. One professor there, who at the time may have seemed to be a little hard on me and I think probably was an

advocate for me, was David Morgan. Going through a program like that, I definitely feel like I got my money's worth out of that school. I definitely feel that in terms of being able to read and disseminate information quickly and write quickly, that program is a great program. David Morgan is certainly someone who helped me to develop. Another teacher in that program, Robert Wood, whom Wesleyan is lucky to have—a former superintendent of the Boston public schools and has held numerous other positions in the field of education—was someone who was extremely instrumental in my development.

I think I've covered the highlights. I should also mention President William Chase, who was very supportive of the things that I was trying to do and even went so far as to hold up my thesis at a meeting for incoming freshmen as a testament to the things that people can do at Wesleyan. I mentioned earlier that Peter Guinness had written letters of recommendation for my thesis, which was titled, "The Experience of African-American Male Students in Private Secondary High Schools: A Rose in a Dandelion Field." Again, it all comes back full circle in terms of being able to do a thesis like that at Wesleyan, to get the support to do a thesis at Wesleyan, and to also tap into some resources from BB&N in order to make that happen through the help of some other individuals whom I've already talked about.

I think I've described most of the individuals I mentioned. I talked about Ron Crichlow already. But if I focus a little bit on my professional development beyond educational environments, I think that Wilson Henderson is also someone who has been instrumental. He actually hired me to work at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Boston as an undergraduate during the summer. That was a good experience for me to get into that situation and see, at a very young age, how a big government agency operates and functions. That was very positive. Also, he was instrumental in me getting a job after Wesleyan and after CORO at the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. That was a great job to have in terms of being in an office at a high level and seeing how a quasi-state government agency is managed and run. So he's someone who has been very instrumental. Dr. John S. Wilson in the provost's office has been an excellent mentor in my educational and professional career.

We talked some about Sloan. I'll jump over that and mention that in my employment at Pitney-Bowes, Gus Stepp was somebody who was extremely supportive of me in that situation and was always available to talk, either at home or in the workplace, about different issues that I was facing in that environment. He probably just as much if not more so than the individuals I've mentioned, aside from my parents, has been one of my biggest advocates. I would also have to mention that in my current situation in terms of being at a Wall Street firm, I need to mention Sam Austin, someone who also has an MIT connection and who has been very supportive of me in terms of finding an opportunity on Wall Street. He definitely has been a very positive mentor. He needs to be acknowledged as well.

Could you talk about your own experience? Is there any advice you might offer to other young black males who perhaps will follow your career as it relates to what you've done so far?

The first thing I would say is that it's important to have a foundation and a belief structure in yourself, and not to get discouraged when things don't necessarily go the way you feel they should go. Remember that you're there for a reason and that you can and will be successful. If things are going fine, that's great, but I think that when things aren't, you need to be able to draw on that inner strength and to seek out people like my father who are in these situations and who have in all likelihood experienced similar things to what you're experiencing, if not worse, just by the nature of the historical development of this country. That's very important. As everybody says, it's important to seek out mentors and advice and to understand that you can't do it all by yourself. That's one of the most critical things that has guided me in what I'm doing.

The other thing is to learn not only in the classroom, but outside the classroom. Take opportunities that you might not have again in your life to interact with people who are different from you, or at least on the surface different from you. I think that you'll find that being at some of these schools like MIT, where people come from all over the world, you're not going to have that opportunity again to interact with people from different countries and different cultures. It's important to take advantage of that, to make time for those types of

interactions. You never know down the road who you might run into or how you might be able to benefit from a relationship that you established as an undergraduate or a graduate student.

Obviously, if you're in these situations, you know the importance of working hard, but I think it's also important to work smart. What I mean by that is to look for ways where you can establish a partnership with other students in your studying, look for ways in which you can gain advice about courses that you're taking before you take them so that you can do the best you can in those courses. Understand that if for whatever reason you need preparation in an area you may want to get into immediately, take the time out and get that preparation. You're at a young point in your life when you can afford yourself the opportunity to bone up on a particular area before jumping into the more advanced area of a topic. You'll be better off that way and you won't lose anything in terms of what you need to do.

Are there any other topics or issues that come to mind as you reflect on your own experience and on the experience of other blacks at MIT?

The one comment I would make that I think about retrospectively is that it's important that we document and record our experiences in these environments. That's one of the many benefits of this project that my father is working on. It will serve as a historical record and a blueprint for the different avenues and the different ways in which African-Americans—people of color—have had experiences as students, professors, employees, and administrators at this institution. We owe it to ourselves to be able to reflect on those experiences for the future generations that will come ahead. So I think that in my mind, you can't put a pricetag on the value of this type of work. It's pioneering and it's a really strong, necessary, and pertinent topic to be explored. The administrators who have supported my father on this project deserve praise and acknowledgment for having the vision to support it. I'm hoping that it will reach people in a way that makes the institution and other institutions in this country more fulfilling, more challenging, and more enriching for everybody involved.