Column/Thomas T. Huang

Minorities reflect on racism at MIT

In the Classroom

Florence Robinson ’88: The ma-

jor issue that black undergrad-

uates at MIT face is the lack of academic support — study groups, black faculty and gradu-

ate teaching assistants, and prac-

tice. This is the biggest problem we can retain black students at MIT.

Edward Page ’89: I found it easy to cal-

cule and as a freshman. When I first went to these classes, I looked around, and I only saw two other black faces. That’s about 3 blacks out of 300 students. Later on, I found out that a lot of the students either were getting together to work on problems, that there had solutions, that people had ideas about how to help MIT by themselves, and they are the ones who end up dropping out.

Lack of Understanding

Page: The black student is put into two categories: either a typical black idiot, or he’s a freak into two categories: he’s either a black student. They should focus on making the environment welcoming for all black students. I was a freshman back in 1971, there were very few undergraduates in mechanical engineering to talk to for help. I hooked up with Professor James Williams. He helped me find out how things worked in the depart-

ment. Williams was an inspira-

tion to me, and that’s why I say role-models are so important for students. Blacks are hesitant to ask white professors, because they after all will look dumb and support the racist policies. I had a special relationship with Williams. We worked together, and we were on the same wavelength.

Racism in the ’80s:

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er to fight. If some incident oc-

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Joel Saynor ’89: I can remem-

ber diverse issues. The black profes-

sor and now that is a different story. It is hard to push me, I expect to be stopped.

Johnston: It was the first week of classes, right after Residence/ Orientation week. I was in McCormick Hall, with two women, on one: white, the other Chinese. I was black. Whenever I run into a dorm, the desk worker stopped me and asked if I lived there. She didn’t stop me. I said, “Yes, I live here. Do you want ID?” Then the desk worker looked at my ID, and she asked, “What is your major?” I said, “Computer Science.” She asked, “What do you major in?”

Thomas T. Huang, a graduate student in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Com-

puter Science, is executive editor of The Tech.

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In a black students’ discussion, some young people were saying that they have been raised across ra-

cism in their lives. How can you be black and say that? Don’t they realize that they are even from the inner-city, but they don’t break down the wall of a racist.

Norman Fortenbery: The 

The black students. They should have varying numbers. Some blacks try to tackle the problems. When I first went to those classes, I looked around, and I only saw two other black faces. That’s about 3 blacks out of 300 students. Later on, I found out that a lot of the students either were getting together to work on problems, that there had solutions, that people had ideas about how to help MIT by themselves, and they are the ones who end up dropping out.

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