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## Racism at MIT

I am encouraged by Professor Sherley's reaffirmation (Open Letter #4) that his current protest is not just about his own tenure at MIT but more importantly, it is about redressing a much bigger problem — racism in America and in the academy. This is indeed the very moral high ground that has brought us together, and I believe most of us who support his noble cause would feel the same.

In a 2000 mediation settlement of a highly publicized case involving the alcohol-binging death of freshman Scott S. Krueger '01, then president Charles M. Vest personally and publicly apologized to the Krueger family and set up a \$1.25M scholarship fund in Krueger's memory besides paying a \$4.75M settlement. He initiated a campaign to house all freshmen on campus that led to the construction of Simmons Hall and other residence facilities (<http://www-tech.mit.edu/V120/N42/42krueger.42n.html>).

In the case of bias against female faculty, Vest made a historic move in 1999 conceding gender discrimination (<http://www-tech.mit.edu/V119/N15/15women.15n.html>), saying, "I have always believed that contemporary gender discrimination within universities is part reality and part perception. True, but I now understand that reality is by far the greater part of the balance."

As Professor Nancy Hopkins put it in 2003, "It took great courage and conscience [for Vest] to say this at that time. Even today, it is not universally accepted or understood. But this comment changed the lives of women scientists nationally and even internationally by greatly increasing awareness of this issue. It led to changes that have improved the lives of female and also male scientists, both at MIT and at many universities outside MIT. I can still remember the shock and joy I felt when these words appeared on my computer screen. I had not thought that anyone in a position of power would come to understand this reality in my lifetime. That the president of MIT had understood it was life-changing for me. Later, it turned out to change many other lives as well." (<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2003/cmv-quotes.html>).

Will President Susan Hockfield rise to the same challenge on the racial discrimination issue? Or will it be the same old hush-hush like the recent Shin and Carpenter wrongful death settlements or the DoD missile fraud scandal, leaving nothing but a "shroud of secrecy" (<http://www-tech.mit.edu/V127/N2/2lawsuits.html>)?

So far, the MIT administration has stopped short of acknowledging that racism has long been, and continues to be, a crippling problem at the Institute that needs immediate redress. The prevailing, deep-seated culture and infrastructure of racial bias at MIT cannot be reversed overnight simply by hiring minority faculty and admitting a more diverse student body, which is only the easy part. It is one thing to say — let's try and double the percentage of underrepresented minority faculty in a decade. It is an entirely

different matter when we, as a community, will finally stand ready to say that once the new corps of minority faculty and students are here, let's make them welcome.

This is a defining moment for the Institute and for the Hockfield presidency. All eyes are now on the MIT leadership, who will hopefully make the right decision to sustain all the values this great institution stands for.

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