

[MUSIC PLAYING]

GRAY: April of 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated. June of '68, Robert Kennedy was assassinated. The small number, 30 perhaps African American students at MIT, created the Black Students Union at MIT.

JACKSON: The Black Student Union presented a list of demands to the administration, except we actually called them proposals 10. And that's when the administration formed the task force on educational opportunity, and asked Paul Gray to lead it.

GRAY: What needed to be done, and what didn't get done until 1968, '69, was high level recruiting. You had to broaden the pool, which is what we finally did.

JACKSON: And so it involved a real commitment on the part of the administration and on the part of students because students were actually going out and recruiting and spending time doing this. It was actually somewhat controversial.

GRAY: We started that fall. We hired a fellow named John Mims, who was African American, to come in and be an assistant director of admissions, to help us on a recruiting front. We said a lot of present MIT students, not very many of them. There were about 30 in a BSU. we sent as many of them who had time and would go out to recruit in predominantly black schools.

JACKSON: Now, I must say, the point of view that I had at the time was that if the Institute wasn't going to do it on its own, then it left no choice but for students to be engaged, partly because they weren't very many black faculty members. And the whole time I had been an undergraduate, there wasn't what seemed like a particularly great commitment to these things.

GRAY: We could have done this five years earlier, and should have done it five years earlier. But the thing that-- up to that time, up till 1968, MIT had never recruited anybody. We waited for applications to come. We got 3,000 or 4,000 applications a year in those days, and admitted a class of 1,000.

They were very good students. Why recruit? It just wasn't somehow on the agenda.

When we were well embarked on this, we'd admitted the first class, we went to the faculty. And we reported at that meeting on what we had done in terms of admissions, and why we had done it, and what the class was coming in looked like. And we got approval for the things we needed approval for.

And that was perhaps the most, at that time, April of '68, was probably the most intensely emotional faculty meeting I'd ever been to. And a couple of people came up to me afterwards and said, I had tears in my eyes when you make this presentation. I didn't make it all.

Black student's made it. Black graduate students made it. Overwhelmingly accepted, but there were certainly people. Some of them came to me later and said, what are you doing?

What are you doing to these kids? Is this a good thing? What are you doing to the quality of the MIT student body?

JACKSON: Paul was amazing because he kept his cool during some very heated times. And he was called names. But so was I, because I was, for some students, too much of a collaborationist. But I think we wanted to keep our focus on where we were going.

GRAY: Maybe to most important thing I did around here.

JACKSON: So I think Paul created an amazing foundation. And so there wouldn't be a real presence if it weren't for what went on during that period. But the degree to which MIT is gone past that I think is a real, still an open issue.