

I first met Walter Carrington with Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka in his offices in Lagos when he was serving as our Ambassador to Nigeria. As I recall, Wole was discussing a visa matter for a person who was being persecuted politically. At the end of their meeting, Walter proudly told me that he was “a Harvard man, long before affirmative action!” And he was right, of course. When Walter attended Harvard College, gaining admission for a black person was something of a statistical miracle, signifying—in a word—brilliance. And the commitment to leadership within the black community, a commitment that Walter filled with grace, elegance, and aplomb. At the time, I never could have imagined that he and his equally brilliant wife, Arese, would become vital parts of the Du Bois Institute and the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research. Walter attended our weekly Du Bois Colloquia with more regularity than any one else. His interventions were consistently wise and thoughtful, generous and searching at the same time. Often he would recount what undergraduate life was like for the very few black students on campus in the early fifties, providing our students and faculty colleagues alike with a unique view of the long history of race relations at Harvard, and introducing us to a world before *Brown v. Board* that we could only imagine otherwise. One of the Hutchins Center’s most precious gifts was the paddle he actually used in the induction ceremony of Martin Luther King, Jr into their fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha. Walter embodied the very best in the black pioneers in the Harvard student body: he was wise, thoughtful, elegant, possessed of a penetrating intellect and a deep determination to fight racism and help other black people gain access to opportunities, such as admission to Harvard, that racist practices historically limited. He was something of a hero to me, a living embodiment of traditions of intellectual excellence and service in the African American community during segregation that one only reads about.

- Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University)