**Kenneth C. Frazier**

**Father’s Influence**

I happened to be born to be the son of a man who was born in 1900 and so just to give you an element of that I was born in 1954. There was only one generation between me and slavery. My grandfather was born into slavery. So I was raised by a single parent father on top of it my mother died when I was very young and the reason I say my father was such a great influence was because he had to play both roles. He had a third grade education or what passed for a third grade education for an African American child in the state of South Carolina. Between 1906 and 1909 he immigrated to Philadelphia at the age of fourteen. He was a self made man. He was a self-educated man. Believed very much in education and despite the fact that he lacked formal education he read two newspapers a day. I remember coming home from college I would drop my books off, we used to joke that we were in sort of a lag with my dad because he would read the last semester’s books and you would come home and he would want to talk to you about something that you had completely forgotten because you had another semester's work. So he was an interesting man in that sense but a very principled very strong-willed self -confident and strong person.

**The Road to Penn State**

When I graduated from high school I thought I was going to the United States Military Academy at West Point. I was admitted and I was ready to go and then I guess no one had focused on the fact, including myself, that I had skipped two grades so I was fifteen and I got a letter from the commandant who said you are two years too young to join the United States Army so you have to go to a prep school and by that time um I had only a couple of schools that I had applied to that were left and Penn State was willing to let me come and so I came to Penn State as a really young freshman. I was sixteen by the time I started and it was really a life-changing event for me. I was born in the inner city of Philadelphia I remember the first time I got off the Greyhound bus in State College. I knew I was some place very different and it literally changed my life.

**Changing Views**

I remember the first time I left to come home as a freshman. It was for the Thanksgiving break and I remember when I got I disembarked from the bus in Philadelphia that my entire neighborhood looked completely different. I was looking at it through a new set of eyes. The street that I grew up on that I learned to play football and baseball on was now so small. My concept of what the world was like of space of possibility had completely transformed in just about six or eight weeks.

**Anchors of the Black Community**

Certainly there was a very, very strong African American community black community at Penn State when I joined here in 1971. I think that it was the prior year as I recall that was the first year where there was a large number of black students who came into University Park and so I think there was a sense when I came to University Park that in some ways the community was getting used to having a large number of black students and the black students of course were making a big adjustment most of us were from urban areas. Penn State was completely different. But what I also recall was that there was some anchors in the community and for me one of those anchors is former vice president whose names was Thelma Price. And Thelma ran a program that was called the educational opportunity program. I actually came in under the educational opportunity program. And Thelma was like a mother in the sense that she was really focused on the black students making sure we made the cultural adjustment but the academic adjustment also.

**First Rate Education**

I graduated from Penn State in 1975 and I left and I went to Harvard Law School. And Harvard Law School could not have been more different from Penn State in terms of the cultural atmosphere. But what was important was I found that although I was one of the few people in my class who went to a state school as opposed to lets say an ivy league school or one of the so called premier private schools. The education that I got at Penn State put me in good stead and so that was a great area of recognition that I had gotten a first rate education at Penn State.

**Irrelevance of Skin Color**

I think of myself as a person who is a custodian and a caretaker of an extraordinary institution that has been here for more than a hundred years that has had a profound impact on human health worldwide, and I don't think it matters what skin color that custodian or caretaker is the responsibility is to ensure that Merck continues to do what it has always done well which is to translate cutting edge science into medically important products that have their impact on people all over the world. You know the human condition does not change because of skin color disease doesn't necessarily discriminate on the basis of skin color.

**Intellectual Capital**

The world in which we operate now is one in which wealth is created largely through intellectual capital. You know in prior times it was created by land wealth and then there came a time in the industrial revolution where it was industrial assets that made the difference. Now we live in a world where it’s really intellectual capital that creates growth and wealth and prosperity. So higher education by definition is necessary for the world to continue to grow and thrive and prosper and I hope that Penn State as one of the premier institutions in the world remains dedicated to a conception of itself where educational opportunity and academic excellence are both viewed as consistent and complimentary goals because if we do that I think we will continue to turn out world class people in all of the disciplines that are represented by Penn State.

**Advice for the Next Generation**

I would encourage all young people to try to look beyond what their immediate comfort level is. I think if there is one thing that Penn State taught me it was that there were different people from different walks of life. I remember my first roommate at Penn State his name was Tom Ferntzler, he was from Lancaster County and he grew up on a farm, a dairy farm as I recall. He went to bed at sundown. His family had no more money than my family had, and so in a lot of ways we had a lot in common although superficially there couldn't be anything more different than a son of a dairy farmer from Lancaster County or the son of a janitor from North Philly. So if you get beyond that superficiality there is a lot of commonality in the world.