



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on December 3, 2020

Intellectual Giant Walter Williams, a Character With Character, Dead at 84

In some very sad news, we must announce that one of the truly great men of our time, Dr. Walter E. Williams, has passed away. A highly respected economics professor and commentator who had a syndicated column and appeared on TV and radio, Williams died Tuesday, December 1 at age 84.

Born in 1936, Williams and a sister were raised by a single mother in Philadelphia, where he spent part of his childhood living in a housing project. Williams had a fine upbringing, however, and proceeded to lift himself up by his bootstraps.

He drove a cab for a spell to earn money, was drafted into the U.S. Army, and later pursued higher education, eventually earning a Ph.D. in economics from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Williams joined the faculty of George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, in 1980, chaired its economics department from 1995 to 2001, and continued teaching at the institution until his death.

(A more complete bio is [here](#).)

Williams will be missed by many, not least of all yours truly. The professor was the only other commentator I read regularly, and I've quoted him in print probably more than any single individual apart from G.K. Chesterton.

What appealed to me is what allured so many: Williams had a simple, straightforward, often witty and always eminently logical way of explaining matters, and his sincerity shone through in his writings. I never attended any of his classes, but he must have been a phenomenal teacher.

Williams was not, however, some stuffy academic. He was also a character and had spunk. This was apparent when, for instance, he would occasionally fill in for radio giant Rush Limbaugh (he was my favorite El Rushbo substitute). And it was not just because his standard introduction was, "Black by popular demand!"

For example, one time, after opining against anti-Second Amendment laws, he concluded by saying with conviction, "If you ever hear that the government has Walter Williams' guns, you'll know Walter Williams is dead."



Photo: Screenshot of YouTube video of Dr. Walter E. Williams — "The Role of Government in a Free Society" via Wikipedia



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Another time he responded to a black caller who snidely asked him if he was one of “those black conservatives” with, “I’m a black radical!”

Of course, he meant “radical” in the way a man who maintains that $2+2=4$ in a land where everyone insists it’s five is radical: By remaining sane in a society gone mad he often found himself on its fringes — accompanied by reality.

On another occasion filling in for Limbaugh, Williams displayed his iconoclasm while discussing the Confederacy by saying, “The South was right to secede, and, furthermore, some governor today ought to get up the guts and try it again” (advice more apropos than ever!).

I had the pleasure of appearing with Williams once, approximately two and a half years ago on the *Conservative Law and Politics* show in Tennessee. (Sadly, the host of that show, [Lee Dryer](#), has also passed on, dying last year of pancreatic cancer at age 55. Lee was another great man and a friend of mine, and I regret not having written a tribute to him.)

But aside from being a character, Williams also possessed character. Opposed to affirmative action and not wishing to benefit from it, he once declined a position at a prestigious (I believe it was Ivy League) university. In explaining why to the interviewer, who I’m sure was shocked, the still young and relatively inexperienced Williams said (I’m paraphrasing), “Since I’m not qualified for this position on paper, it would be obvious that you’d hired me just because of my race.”

Later, when he accepted his position at George Mason, he warned the person who’d taken him on, “If I find out you hired me only because I’m black, I will quit on that day.”

Hiring Williams was a wise decision, of course, as he would become a great, great voice for liberty and economic common sense and would touch many. Attesting to this are the tributes from his fans, which just keep pouring in (sample below).

Wow, what a punch in the gut. I am told that one of my heroes, Dr. Walter Williams, passed away. Walter had an enormous influence on me, from the time I was 13-years old; he was my first guest on Life, Liberty & Levin. I'll discuss more tonight on radio.

— Mark R. Levin (@marklevinshow) [December 2, 2020](#)

Very sad news. Walter Williams was legendary. He was brilliant, incisive, witty, and profound. I grew up reading him, and he was a ferocious defender of free markets and a powerful explainer of the virtues of Liberty. <https://t.co/DrwZo5yxqR>

— Ted Cruz (@tedcruz) [December 2, 2020](#)

RIP Walter Williams. his segments on "Free to Choose" were some of the best. <pic.twitter.com/QLC4dD9bkS>

— tsar becket adams (@BecketAdams) [December 2, 2020](#)

Walter Williams was an amazing person and thinker. RIP. <https://t.co/Pf9MEGAfjI>

— Ben Shapiro (@benshapiro) [December 2, 2020](#)



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(Hat tip: the [Independent Sentinel](#).)

He certainly was — and his legacy will live on.

Walter Williams now joins his beloved wife, Connie, who died in December 13 years ago; and is survived by their daughter, Devyn. He also leaves behind a good friend of his, fellow prominent economist Dr. Thomas Sowell.

May he rest in peace after a life very, very well lived.



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