



STATEMENT OF THE U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

THE PASSING OF DR. WALTER WILLIAMS

The United States Commission on Civil Rights mourns the passing of Dr. Walter E. Williams, the John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University.

In *Up from the Projects: An Autobiography*, Dr. Williams wrote, “While starting out poor, my life, like that of so many other Americans, both black and white, illustrates one of the many great things about our country: just because you know where a person ended up in life doesn’t mean you know with any certainty where he began.”¹

He was raised by a single mother “in a lower-middle-class, mixed, but predominantly black neighborhood . . . in West Philadelphia.”² His early life “consisted of drifting and incertitude as to what [he] wanted to do,”³ but after service in the U.S. Army—during which he campaigned against racial injustice in both the military and society at-large—and marriage to his dearest friend, Connie, Dr. Williams enrolled as a full-time student at California State College at Los Angeles in 1962. Largely influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction*, he determined to study economics, and he pursued advanced degrees at the University of California, Los Angeles.

He taught at several colleges and universities before accepting a professorship at George Mason University in 1980, where he remained as a faculty member for the rest of his life. Dr. Williams was a prolific author, having written many scholarly articles and several books, including *The State Against Blacks* and *Race and Economics*. He was a frequent radio and television commentator, and he served on the advisory boards of numerous institutions. He was a Ford Foundation Fellow, a Hoover Institution National Fellow, and a recipient the 2017 Bradley Prize from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

But above all, Dr. Williams was a teacher. His classes—which he preferred to teach early in the morning—would fill up quickly. “I love what I do,” said Dr. Williams in a 2011 interview. “A lot of people look forward to Friday. I don’t. I look forward to the classroom.”⁴

Today, the United States Commission on Civil Rights honors Dr. Williams’s very full life. The loss to his daughter, Devyn, and to his students and colleagues at George Mason University is difficult to contemplate, but his legacy as an independent thinker and courageous American will certainly live on.

¹ WALTER E. WILLIAMS, *UP FROM THE PROJECTS: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY* x (2010).

² *Id.* at 1.

³ *Id.* at 26.

⁴ John J. Miller, *Walter Williams’s Big Classroom*, NAT’L REV., Apr. 2011.