



THE LEGACY OF WALTER WILLIAMS

In December of 2020, the world lost a leading light in modern economics, [Walter Williams](#). Williams was that rare breed of economist who can also rightly be considered a public intellectual. Through his syndicated columns, talk radio appearances, lectures and his many books for the popular press, Williams was a premier explicator of the principles of economics. These same principles led Williams to be profoundly skeptical of government interventions for both social and economic ends. Above all, Williams was a teacher. Though Williams will not grace a classroom any longer, there remains much we can learn from his legacy. We've asked the economists featured in this month's edition to help us do just that.

WALTER WILLIAMS: A FOND REMEMBRANCE

by Harold Black

Perhaps the greatest compliment paid to Walter Williams is that Thomas Sowell considered him his oldest and closest friend. [\[1\]](#) Like Sowell, Williams used common sense – the basis of economics – to address contemporary problems. Economics tells us that [price controls](#) such as minimum wages, rent control, and usury ceilings may help a few individuals but will harm many

“A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF PRIMARY AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS WERE MEN. DISCIPLINE WAS ENFORCED. TIMES HAVE CHANGED. WILLIAMS CONTENDS THAT THE MODERN EDUCATION SYSTEM IS A FAILURE IN LARGE PART DUE TO THE LAXITY OF DISCIPLINE AND LOWER ACADEMIC STANDARDS.”

more. Such facts led both to embrace [capitalism](#) and [free markets](#) as the mechanisms best suited to improve the

well-being of the poor. Both cited historic and modern examples to illustrate their points. Williams’ use of common sense was often devastating and generated the usual chorus of wails from those who disagreed. However, Williams could not have cared less. On issues such as education, limited government, democracy, income redistribution, welfare, and race, Williams provided wit, logic, and reason in areas where there was often very little. To the chagrin of his critics, they could do little to prove him wrong.

When writing about the [education](#) of Black children and their tragic performance in reading and math Williams stated that such performance was not always the case. Citing Sowell, Williams reminds us that all-Black schools during segregation demonstrated academic excellence. [\[2\]](#) Frederick Douglass High in Baltimore, Paul Laurence Dunbar High in Washington, DC and my alma mater, Booker T. Washington High in Atlanta excelled in an era where Blacks were poorer and overtly discriminated against. Williams implies that the education of Black children did not benefit from integration, and the evidence supports him. The question is why? During segregation, school teaching was an honorable occupation when the only jobs available to college educated Blacks were in the government or self-employment. A high percentage of primary and high school teachers were men. Discipline was enforced.

Times have changed. Williams contends that the modern education system is a failure in large part due to the laxity of discipline and lower academic standards. Today the educators and “elites” have replaced what worked with what sounds good. Williams once said he was 74 years old and was glad that he had received most of his education before it became fashionable for white people to like Black people which meant that he was obligated to live up to higher standards. [3]

Williams would point out the obvious when the obvious was being ignored. He was a skeptic of “systemic racism” and stated that the plight experienced by many Blacks had little to do with systemic racism or with the actions of the police. He noted that in many of our major cities, Blacks control many of the elected positions, police departments, and school officials. These cities have dreadful schools and high rates of crime, especially murders. Williams asks where the systemic racism is when Blacks are in control? It’s a question that the left avoids answering. Williams also implies that the left and the mainstream media conspire to keep Blacks distracted from addressing the main sources of their discontent by focusing on subjects like shootings – however infrequent – by the police. A poll asked how many unarmed Blacks were killed by police in 2019. Twenty percent answered 10,000 or more! The correct answer was 13. [4] The situation is not helped when famous Blacks, like LeBron James, tweet “I’m so damn tired of seeing black people killed by police.” To date, James has said very little about Black people being killed by Black people. In Chicago alone there were 769 homicides in 2020. Moreover, record homicides of Blacks are being recorded in most of our major cities. Where is the outrage?

Williams was a fierce advocate of limited government and opponent of forced income [redistribution](#). He famously stated, “Let me offer you my definition of social justice: I keep what I earn and you keep what you earn. Do you disagree? Well you tell me what I earn belongs to you – and why?” [5] He also stated “No matter how worthy the cause, it is robbery, theft and injustice to confiscate the property of one person and give it to another to whom it does not belong.” [6] As such, Williams added to the

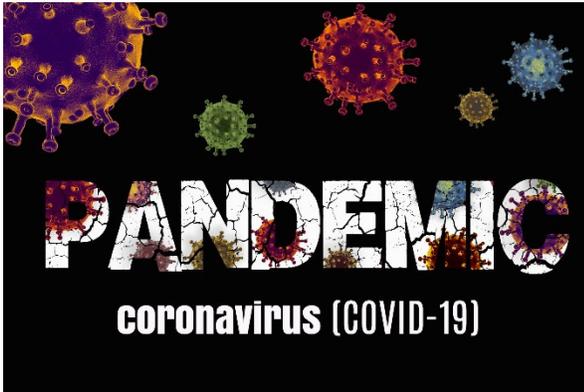
debate of reparations and paying one’s “fair share” and did it in a manner that was intentionally provocative. Williams’ prescription for lessening poverty was simple: “complete high school; get a job, any kind of job; get married before having children; and be a law-abiding citizen. Among both Black and white Americans so described, the poverty rate is in the single digits.” [7] A controversial statement in today’s “woke” climate but again one that cannot be proven wrong.



Although Williams was labeled as a “conservative”, he was even handed when it came to criticizing both liberals and conservatives in government. Both liberals and conservatives advocate the confiscation of one person’s property to give it to another. The difference was in who was to get the spoils. In essence, [taxation](#) was theft, and since the government is essentially nonproductive, it has to seize the property of others to function and to reward its friends and not its enemies (which change with each election). To quote Williams, “The compelling issue for both conservatives and liberals is not whether it is legitimate for government to confiscate one’s property to give it to another, the debate is over the disposition of the pillage.” [8]

Williams loved America and warned about the dangers inherent in democracy. In his “The United States is not a Democracy, Thank Goodness” [9] he liberally quotes the [Founding Fathers](#) arguing that democracy leads to the tyranny of the majority. A democracy is where 50+1 percent can confiscate the property of the other 49 percent. John Marshall noted that “between a balanced republic and a democracy, the difference is like that

between order and chaos.” Thus, Williams was an advocate for a limited federal government, individual freedom, the separation of powers, and institutions such as the Electoral College. For Williams, the Electoral College prevented national elections from being determined by a minority of states – those with large populations – and imposing their politics on the rest of the country.



Williams reminded us to weigh costs and benefits. During the COVID-19 pandemic Williams chided governments for often taking actions without the benefit of any scientific justification and with no consideration of costs and benefits. He quoted then New York governor Cuomo who said that any action is justified so long as it saved one life. As Williams said, “Cuomo knows that many Americans buy into such a seemingly caring statement that would be easily revealed as utter nonsense if one had just a modicum of economic knowledge. Prudent decision-making requires one to compare benefits to costs.” [10] The example he gives is clear. He notes that there were 36,120 traffic deaths in 2019. Most could have been saved if there were a mandated speed limit of 5 miles per hour. When the costs and inconvenience of such a mandate are considered, it is clear that the benefits of saving those lives are outweighed by the costs. The same can be said about the shutdowns and mandates during the COVID panic.

Lastly, Williams was a vocal skeptic of man-made climate change. He cited the numerous grossly inaccurate predictions of doom and gloom related to climate change that proved not to be true. Here, Williams is at his acerbic best, deriding those who say it’s “settled science.” [11] He

stated that “mounting evidence suggests that claims of manmade global warming might turn out to be the greatest hoax in mankind's history. Immune and hostile to the evidence.” [12] Williams points out that earth went through a period of global warming which ended the Ice Age. Although there were a few humans on the planet, Williams notes that the end of the Ice Age was not caused by “coal-fired electric generation plants, incandescent light bulbs and sport utility vehicles tooling up and down the highways.” [13] Williams further states “there is much at stake in getting people to subscribe to the global warming religion. There is so much at stake that some scientists, using government grants, are fraudulently manipulating climate data and engaging in criminal activity.” [14] Lastly, he states “The absolute worst case of professional incompetence and dishonesty is in the area of climate science.” Needless to say, such a statement did not go unchallenged. However, a careful reading of both Williams’ criticisms and the rejoinder show that Williams is not referring to all climate scientists but only those who have adopted climate change as a religion and as a vehicle for enriching themselves. Which side is right? The important thing to remember is that Walter Williams loved to poke the bear and provoke controversy. He succeeded and he will be missed.

- [1] Sowell, “Walter Williams’ Memoir: Up from the Projects, *The New American*, December 8, 2010.
- [2] Williams, “Black Education Tragedy is New” December 2, 2020, in *Selected Syndicated Columns*, walterwilliams.com.
- [3] Williams, “Liberals Confuse Me,” *The New American*, September 29, 2010.
- [4] Kevin Drum, “How Many Unarmed Black Men are Killed by the Police? Poll says Conservatives have the Best Estimates,” February 23, 2021, jabberwocking.com.
- [5] Walter E. Williams (<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/3104-walter-e-williams>)
- [6] Walter E. Williams (<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/3104-walter-e-williams>)

[7] Walter E. Williams
(<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/3104-walter-e-williams>)

[8] Walter E. Williams
(<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/3104-walter-e-williams>)

[9] Williams, Creators Syndicate, February 1, 2020.

[10] Williams, “Insane News Tidbits,” The Daily Wire, May 31, 2020.

[11] Williams, “Global Warming,” Town Hall, March 11, 2015.

[12] Williams, Climate Change Advocates Update and Invalidate Themselves,” Washington Examiner, February 23, 2010.

[13] Williams, “It’s Arrogant to Say Humans Cause Global Warming,” Desert News, January 13, 2010.

[14] Williams, *ibid.*

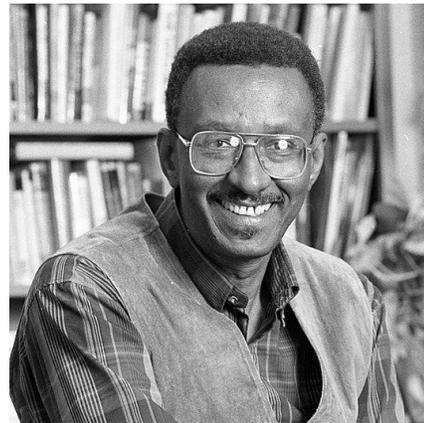
WALTER E. WILLIAMS, ONE OF A KIND

by Donald J. Boudreaux

Walter Williams (1936-2020) catapulted into my consciousness in the late 1970s. One afternoon while flipping through the channels – numbering all of five – on my parents’ television set I happened upon television talk-show host Phil Donohue chatting with a guest who made unusually good sense.

By then I’d already fallen in love with economics; it was my collegiate major, and I was, I think, then in my junior year. The guest’s uncompromising and eloquent defense of free markets pleasantly surprised me. I was even more surprised that he was Black. I knew that free-market policies were promoted by white guys such as [Milton Friedman](#) and William Simon. But Walter Williams – Donohue’s guest – was the first Black person I’d seen doing so.

Donohue peppered Walter with questions – ‘Should we abolish the minimum wage?’ *Yes*. ‘Don’t you agree that [labor unions](#) were key to creating America’s middle class?’ *No*. ‘Hasn’t the welfare state helped Blacks?’ *No*. ‘Isn’t affirmative action needed to give minorities a fair chance?’ *No*. On and on this questioning went until Donohue asked Walter about some arms-control treaty between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Walter paused for a moment, then laughed and said “Unlike you, Mr. Donohue, I don’t pretend to know everything about everything.”



Donohue cut for a commercial break. (Not long before he died, I asked Walter if my recollection of his appearance on Donohue was accurate. He assured me that it was.)

I scribbled the name ‘Walter Williams’ into a notebook. I wanted to know more about this man’s work but in that pre-Internet age found little to read. Nevertheless, I was reassured to know that there was in the world this articulate, charismatic, informed, and principled champion of economic freedom.

The next time I encountered Walter was again on television during his appearance on Friedman’s 1980 [Free To Choose](#) program. I enthusiastically soaked it all in. I was a fan-boy.

In 1980, as a senior in college, I was unaware that just five years later I would become one of Walter’s colleagues at George Mason University. I also became his friend. I will forever regard Walter’s befriending me as a singular stroke of good fortune for myself. Through countless discussions in his office and over dinners I got to know

Walter quite well. It speaks well of the man I got to know quite well that he was in private no different than he was in public. There was about Walter Williams nothing at all facile or false.

Walter had four characteristics that particularly warrant mention because, together, they are what made Walter the unique public intellectual that he was.

The first of Walter's notable characteristics was his principle. I've never known, and will never know, a man more principled than Walter. In practical affairs, he was no utilitarian. For Walter, many actions are simply wrong, and no amount of utilitarian calculation can make such actions otherwise. Nor are wrong actions made right by being performed by government officials. Because in principle it is wrong for Jones to use coercion to stop Smith from spending money in whatever peaceful ways Smith chooses, it is wrong for government, acting at Jones's behest, to so obstruct Smith's actions. Because in principle it is wrong for Jones as a private citizen to coerce Smith into employing or serving people who Smith doesn't wish to employ or to serve, it is wrong for Jones as an elected official to do the same.



Walter was adamant that approval by a majority of voters, or by a majority of judges on a court, never turns wrong actions right.

The second of Walter's special characteristics – related to, but distinct from, the first – was his courage. He said and wrote what he believed. Not only did he never trim, he also never shrank from engaging an opponent. Walter knew, of course, that much of his message was unpopular. That knowledge, if it affected him at all, seemed only to fuel his desire to deliver the message.

Walter occasionally received death threats. He received enough of them that, when in 2006 an article I wrote on [immigration](#) brought what appeared to be a credible threat against my nine-year-old son's life, I immediately called Walter for advice. Walter's calm counsel during those troubling few days was invaluable.

A third characteristic was Walter's unusual facility with basic economic reasoning. An economist's skill is perhaps best measured by how much complex economic reality he or she can explain using only economic principles. Any mediocre economist can explain a good deal of economic reality by using the whole armament, including the jargon, that comes with PhD-level training. But only the finest economists can explain that same reality – and often explain it more fully and clearly – using only basic economic propositions. Milton Friedman was notable for possessing this rare skill, as is Thomas Sowell. Walter was in their league.

Possession of this skill is key to the ability to communicate profound economic understanding to general audiences. An example is [Walter's explanation of why minimum-wage legislation has a worse impact on Blacks than it has on whites](#):

What minimum wage laws do is lower the cost of, and hence subsidize, racial preference indulgence. After all, if an employer must pay the same wage no matter whom he hires, the cost of discriminating in favor of the people he prefers is cheaper. This is a general principle. If filet mignon sold for \$9 a pound and chuck steak \$4, the cost of discriminating in favor of filet mignon is \$5 a pound, the price difference. But if a law mandating a minimum price for chuck steak were on the books, say, \$7 a pound, it would lower the cost of discrimination against chuck steak.

Within this example is evidence of the fourth of Walter's notable characteristics – namely, his skillful use of what I call “gentle, humorous shock.” Walter understood that an effective way to grab an audience's attention is with a bit of shock mixed with humor. Not shock that's gross or grotesque. Not shock or humor for the sake of

themselves. But shock and humor that are just enough to seize a reader's or listener's attention and to intellectually stir that person into letting go of prior misconceptions. Comparing low-skilled workers to inferior cuts of meat shocks people, and even offends many. But the comparison works well to convey the economic lesson.

No doubt the most notable – and shocking – of Walter's use of "gentle, humorous shock" is his "[Proclamation of Pardon For European-Americans](#)." Here's its ending:

I, Walter E. Williams, do declare full and general amnesty and pardon to all persons of European ancestry, for both their own grievances, and those of their forebears, against my people.

Therefore, from this day forward Americans of European ancestry can stand straight and proud knowing they are without guilt and thus obliged not to act like damn fools in their relationships with Americans of African ancestry.

This proclamation was no shock-jock-like stunt. Walter truly believed that, post-slavery, much Black suffering was the direct result of well-meaning but economically illiterate whites attempting to assuage their guilt by supporting affirmative action and other policies that unintentionally burden the majority of Blacks with additional harm. This Proclamation combines gentle shock with dry humor to make what Walter believed to be a vital point – a vital point, be aware, ultimately not so much for the benefit of whites as for the benefit of Blacks.

Milton Friedman had, and Thomas Sowell has, the first three of the above-mentioned characteristics. What set Walter apart from these two giants was his unique ability to command audience attention by combining humor with gentle shock. Some talented economists, such as Thomas Hazlett, who write for the general public excel at effectively using humor. Other economists, such as Steven Landsburg, excel at effectively using shock. But no first-rate economist combined humor with gentle shock quite the way Walter did. It's a combination that works and that is now sorely missed.

Because Walter treasured honesty and forthrightness, I must note what I believe to have been one of Walter's few flaws. He came to so detest the Progressive left that

he occasionally took positions – or so it seemed to me – only because he believed those positions were opposed by the left.

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An example is [his support for immigration restrictions](#). Although never coming close to being a nativist or supporter of closed borders, at least toward the end of his life Walter failed to turn on immigration restrictions the same critical eye that he turned on most other government restrictions. While his usual stance was to [vigorously defend the concept of natural rights](#), and thus to deny the legal-positivist proposition that rights are created by legislation – I often heard Walter declare strong support for individuals who disobey statutory diktats that he believed to violate natural rights – he treated immigration differently. He insisted that an immigrant's presence in the U.S. in violation of the existing statutory code is sufficient to render that person an unethical scofflaw who doesn't deserve to live in the U.S.

I emphasize, however, that Walter's flaws were indeed few. *Enviably* few. For more than four decades he reigned as one of the world's premier champions of freedom. A dedicated teacher and tireless defender of the classical-liberal values that he correctly understood motivated the founding of the American nation, Walter's vast body of work will not only continue to inspire those of us already in the liberal camp, but also to challenge those who as yet aren't.

WALTER WILLIAMES: A LEGACY OF LIBERTY

by John Sibley Butler

Professor Walter Williams left an uncomplicated legacy that was grounded in liberty and the movement of free markets. Human history is the story of a social fabric of relationships, families, friends, and the search for liberty. Connected to this social fabric is the engine that gives substance to our lives, how we sustain ourselves. For Walter Williams, of all the different possible engines, the [free market](#) stood as the best solution for present and future generations engaged in the search for liberty. As an economist, he used the free market to understand and explain Americans through time and space. As such, he stands in a long line of scholars and writers such as Henry M. Minton, Booker T. Washington, Abram L. Harris and, T.M. Pryor, all of whom studied Black American historical data. They all placed Black Americans squarely in the tradition of taking their problems to the free market to find the solution to the question “how can Black Americans live in America.” Indeed, the gift to Americans, for Williams, is the free market, which produces and is the very thing that helps to define liberty. If liberty is defined as the right or privilege to do as one pleases, at its base, then it is the context of the free market that provides the engine for liberty. [\[1\]](#) Other writers and scholars asked the same kind of question but located most of the problems in America within its economic structure.

Walter E. Williams’s work, and his life, prove his hypothesis about the importance of the free market ([capitalism](#)) and limited government. In his *American Contempt for Liberty*, [\[2\]](#) he states the thesis that guides his work: “Capitalism is relatively new in human history. Prior to capitalism, the way people amassed great wealth was by looting, plundering, and enslaving their fellow man. With the rise of capitalism, it became possible to amass great wealth by serving and pleasing one’s fellow man. Capitalists seek to discover what people want and then produce and market it as efficiently as possible as a means to wealth.” [\[3\]](#) Williams noted that compared to

heaven, capitalism fails. It also fails when compared to any utopia. For the common person, capitalism is a superior economic system to any other in the history of the world. He also believes that it is the choices that we make in business that are important and in doing so, we should not depend upon government to bail us out. As he noted in the Preface of *American Contempt for Liberty*, “The columns contained in this selected collection represent my efforts to sell my fellow Americans on the moral superiority of personal liberty and its main ingredient—limited government. [\[4\]](#)



Any hypothesis needs data and Walter Williams dedicated his work to establishing data to support his thesis around many subjects. In the sea of ideas, there are many scholars who opposed (and oppose) capitalism. He noted that “A few years ago, according to UCLA’s Bruin Standard, Mary Corey, UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) history professor, instructed her class, “Capitalism is not a lie on purpose. It’s just a lie.” She continued, “[Capitalists] are swine...They’re bastard people.” [\[5\]](#) Grounded in the professor’s comments is the acceptance of another system, communism or socialism. Williams always presents data when confronted with these arguments, which are plentiful in the literature. As he noted in *Liberty Versus the Tyranny of Socialism: Controversial Essays*, “Rank nations according to whether they are closer to the capitalist end or the communism end of the economic spectrum. Then rank nations according to human rights protections. Finally,

rank nations according to per capita income. Without question, citizens of those nations close to capitalism enjoy a higher standard of living and a far greater measure of liberty than those in nations closer to communism.” [6]

“CLASSICAL ECONOMISTS ARGUED
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Flowing through the writings of Professor Williams is the importance of [profits](#) for the capitalist system. This is an issue that has worried economists for years and stands at the very center of the analysis of capitalism as an economic system. Classical economists argued that profit is a bribe, necessary as an incentive for business people to take risks. Since it is a bribe, how can it be justified on moral grounds? This was a query that had driven nineteenth-century economists, such as [John Stuart Mill](#), to accept [socialism](#) as they aged. This moral issue of profit was the justification for [Karl Marx](#) to condemn the capitalist as wicked and immoral and thus predict his downfall and that of the capitalist system. But at this time the classical economist thought of capitalism as a closed system, and there was absolutely no justification for profit. But [Joseph A. Schumpeter](#) opened the system, took away its closed walls, and argued that capital is really a cost; the cost of staying in business and providing for the future. It is the only way to maintain jobs for the future and to escape what he called [creative destruction](#), as new technologies destroys older ones. Schumpeter provided a mathematical function for profit, thus making capitalism once again a moral system. [7] Walter Williams understood this when he noted, “The Occupy Wall Street demonstrators are demanding “people before profits”-as if profit motivation were the source of mankind’s troubles-when it’s often the absence of profit motivation that’s the true villain.” [8]

The greatest test of Walter Williams’s hypothesis about capitalism came in the dynamic of race and society. In [Race and Economics: How much can be blamed on discrimination?](#) He blended the history of Black

entrepreneurship with the rewards of liberty and the importance of market economies. Like Booker T. Washington, Abraham Harris, and T.M. Pryor, he showed how an open capitalist society has always provided the best economic route for liberty for those who chose it. In the Chapter “Blacks Today and Yesterday,” he blended the success of history with the denial of that success today: “Black Americans, compared with any other racial group, have come the greatest distance, over some of the highest hurdles, in a shorter period of time. This unprecedented progress can be verified ...if one were to total black earnings and consider black Americans a separate nation, he would find that, in 2008, they earned \$726 billion.” To show how important liberty is in America, he juxtaposed his own experience in [Up From The Projects: An Autobiography](#). Walter Williams showed how Blacks have made the best of things by using the free market and liberty at the worst of times. His experience took him through the military to becoming an economist who understood liberty.

It is the movement of ideas through time and space which is important. In the public square, Professor Williams's ideas should stand tall as the future races toward us. His research shows how powerful the concept of liberty is, and how it should remain a strong tool as America continues to race on its mission to provide opportunities for people around the world. Professor Williams understood why there are masses of immigrants at our doors looking for liberty, in the land of liberty.

[1] For a discussion, see Mordecai Roshwald (2000). *Liberty Its Meaning and Scope* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press); John Stuart Mill (2002-classic). *On Liberty* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.)

[2] Walter E. Williams (2015). *American Contempt for Liberty* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

[4] *Ibid.* p. xix.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

[6] Walter E. Williams (2008). *Liberty Versus the Tyranny of Socialism: Controversial Essays* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), p. 25.

[7] This discussion has gone on for centuries. For an excellent discussion see Peter Drucker (1986). *The Frontiers of Management* (New York: Truman Talley Books), pp. 105-115.

[8] Walter E. Williams (2005), *op.cit.* p.355.

WALTER WILLIAMS: COMMON SENSE, CONTROVERSIAL, RADICAL by Ramon P. DeGennaro

Walter Williams made so much sense that people considered him to be controversial, even radical. A review of his contributions would take a book-length article. He has written a double-handful of books and thousands of essays. Today, many people have not even read 10 books! I do not pretend to have read all of his works, but I can focus on a few ideas that seem most expansive and timeless.

His style -- deliberately provocative -- leads some to think that Williams didn't care what his critics -- or his supporters -- thought. I beg to differ, and I think he would, too. How could anyone publish so much material aimed at informing readers if he didn't care what they thought? True, he didn't care what you thought of him, but he cared deeply about whether you thought, for example, that [minimum wage laws](#) are a good way to help the poor. Ideas shape behavior, and behavior matters. His good friend, Thomas Sowell, once wrote, "I'm not sure I want to be particularly remembered. I would like the ideas that I've put out there to be remembered." [1] Like Sowell, Williams didn't care about your approval, but he did care about your willingness to think and to analyze data, even if -- perhaps especially if -- it upset your beliefs.

Time and ideas are the only resources that will always be scarce. If there is another stubbornly scarce resource,

though, it is people who can convey complex concepts to a lay audience. At this, Williams was past master, using vivid images, analogies, and blunt language to fix ideas in memory.

Freedom and Capitalism

Belief in freedom and [capitalism](#) were the foundation of Williams' personal and professional life. "Prior to capitalism, the way people amassed great wealth was by looting, plundering, and enslaving their fellow man. With the rise of capitalism, it became possible to amass great wealth by serving and pleasing one's fellow man." [2] This statement presupposes that we are allowed to trade goods that we own, which in turn presupposes our right to own property. Williams knew that gains from voluntary trade make us both better off. He knew that our right to own property is essential to prosperity.



I wish Williams had put more emphasis on the apparent tension between capital and labor. In a political sense, these are rivals, fighting over a (typically fixed) pie. In an economic sense, though, these two components of production and prosperity are as much compliments as they are substitutes. Or, perhaps, Williams might have written that capital is to labor as ice is to water: two forms of the same substance. Skilled laborers work many hours to build capital assets such as bulldozers or railroad cars.

Williams also pressed hard for individual freedom and personal accountability. We need freedom to make our

own choices, for better or for worse. Sometimes, we make bad choices, which sometimes lead to bad outcomes. Williams pulled no punches. “If you're a poor adult in America, for the most part, it's all your fault,” and “Having children is not an act of God. It's not like you're walking down the street and pregnancy strikes you; children are a result of a conscious decision. For the most part, female-headed households are the result of short-sighted, self-destructive behavior of one or two people.” [3] Shunning nebulous, external reasons for poverty that are beyond the control of any individual, Williams focused much of his work on the consequences of bad choices. He offers a simple (but not necessarily easy) solution to much of today's poverty: “Complete high school; get a job, any kind of a job; get married before having children; and be a law-abiding citizen.” [4] Among both Black and white Americans who have done that, he writes, the poverty rate is in single digits.



The Black Family

“The No. 1 problem among blacks is a very weak family structure. Children from fatherless homes are likelier to drop out of high school, die by suicide, have behavioral disorders, join gangs, commit crimes and end up in prison. They are also likely to live in poverty-stricken households.” [5] The data paint a stark picture: Most Black children were raised in two-parent families in 1960. Only 22 percent were raised in single-parent families. By 2010, the figures had essentially reversed: only 30 percent of Black children were raised in two-parent families.

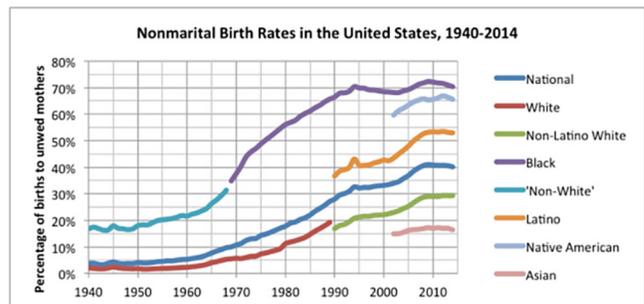
These are shocking and tragic numbers. Williams asked the right question: “Was the increase in single-parent

black families after 1960 a legacy of slavery, or might it be a legacy of the welfare state ushered in by the War on Poverty?” [6] Williams also knew the politically unpopular answer, and didn't shy away from it: “A major problem,” Williams wrote, “is that some public and private policies reward dependency and irresponsibility. Chief among these policies is the welfare state that has fostered a 75 percent rate of out of wedlock births and decimated the Black family that had survived Jim Crow and racism. The poverty rate among husband-and-wife Black families has been in the single digits for more than two decades.” [7] In contrast, “The greatest percentage of poverty is found in female-headed households. Over 70 percent of female-headed households are poor. A large percentage of poor people are children (17 percent); fully 85 percent of black children living in poverty reside in a female-headed household.” [8]

The sad conclusion, he writes, is that, “(F)or 50 years, the well-meaning leftist agenda has been able to do to blacks what Jim Crow and harsh racial discrimination could never have done: family breakdown, illegitimacy and low academic achievement.” [9]

The Canary in the Coal Mine

Williams makes a powerful case that ostensibly compassionate government policies have decimated the Black family, but to my knowledge, he never considered the data in a way that highlights a frightening future. Consider the following chart [10]:



Readers might conclude that Black nonmarital birthrates are much higher than whites and other racial groups. Indeed, most writers do this. A much more dangerous trend is also evident: all ethnic groups have shown increases; the rate for Blacks is just the highest.

I wish Williams had explored the data from a different perspective. Instead of interpreting the chart as Blacks having higher nonmarital birthrates than whites, we can think of Black nonmarital birthrates as leading or forecasting white rates. For convenience, set aside the splicing of the “Non-White” and “Black” data (in 1968), and the “White” and “Non-Latino White” data (in 1990) and refer to the spliced series as simply Black and white. In 1943, the Black rate was about 16 percent. The white rate at the time was in the low single-digits, but by 1986, it had reached the level of the Black population about a bit over 40 years earlier. By 1960, the Black rate had reached about 22 percent. By 2000 – 40 years later – so had the white rate. By the late 1960s, the Black rate was up to about 30 percent; by the late 2000s – 40 years later -- so was the white rate. Similarly, the Black rate leads the Latino rate, and the Latino rate leads the white rate.

Williams would surely note that this increase is likely to be followed by, and likely cause, an increase in poverty and violence. This is a tragedy if confined to one ethnic group. Encompassing the entire population, it is a catastrophic, existential threat to an entire society.

White Guilt

Sowell was correct, but incomplete, when he wrote, “If you have always believed that everyone should play by the same rules and be judged by the same standards, that would have gotten you labeled a radical 60 years ago, a liberal 30 years ago and a racist today.” [11] This is true, but believing that everyone should play by the same rules and be judged by the same standards is not just racist today. It is once again radical. A large number of Americans today are inured to the idea that Blacks must receive preferential treatment to achieve success. Holding everyone, particularly Blacks, to the same standards as whites is now, once again, astonishingly, radical.

Williams detested such double-standards. He also had no use for its cousin, white guilt. He viewed it as unhelpful at best, and more likely harmful. “Many black problems are exacerbated by guilt-ridden white people. Often, they accept behavior and standards from Black people that they would not begin to accept from white

people.” [12] Williams refused to accept that Blacks could only succeed if whites deigned to lower the bar so Blacks could clear it. White guilt is also insulting and condescending, displayed by those eager to signal their virtue. With characteristic, acerbic wit, he wrote, “I’m glad I received virtually all of my education before it became fashionable for white people to like black people. By that I mean I encountered back then a more honest assessment of my strengths and weaknesses. Professors didn’t hesitate to criticize me — sometimes even to the point of saying, “That’s nonsense, Williams.” [13]

True to form, he issued his famous (to some, perhaps, infamous) proclamation of amnesty and pardon. After listing the sins of America’s past, he notes that other races have also suffered horrible oppression. He concludes,

“Therefore, from this day forward Americans of European ancestry can stand straight and proud knowing they are without guilt and thus obliged not to act like damn fools in their relationships with Americans of African ancestry.” [14]

Radical, indeed!

[1] Malkin, Michelle (2016). Thank You, Professor Sowell. Townhall. <https://townhall.com/columnists/michellemalkin/2016/12/28/thank-you-professor-sowell-n2264076>

[2] Williams, [Walter E.](#) (2013). The Pope and Capitalism. Creators Syndicate. <https://www.creators.com/read/walter-williams/12/13/the-pope-and-capitalism>. This phrase also appears in slightly different form elsewhere.

[3] Williams, [Walter E.](#) (2003). Poverty in America. JWR. <https://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/williams021903.asp>

[4] Williams, [Walter E.](#) (2018). Williams: A simple formula for avoiding poverty. Gaston Gazette. <https://www.gastongazette.com/story/opinion/columns/guest/2018/07/31/williams-simple-formula-for-avoiding-poverty/11192278007/>

[5] Williams, [Walter E.](#) (2017). [The Welfare State's Legacy.](#) <http://walterwilliams.com/the-welfare-states-legacy/>

[6] Ibid.

[7] Williams, [Walter E.](#) (2020). Walter Williams: Enough With the Insults to Black History. CNSnews.

<https://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/walter-e-williams/walter-williams-enough-insults-black-history>

[8] Williams, Walter E. Quoted at https://www.ihnsprisingquotes.us/quotes/dmKA_zc5hutE6

[9] Williams, [Walter E.](#) Quoted at https://www.azquotes.com/author/18339-Walter_E_Williams

[10] <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/moynihan-report-1965/>. The chart is not part of the Moynihan Report.

[11] Sowell, Thomas. Quoted at <https://politipeeps.com/libertarian-quotes-memes/thomas-sowell/>

[12] Williams, [Walter E.](#) (2020). WALTER WILLIAMS: Blacks of yesteryear and today. The Daily Home.

<https://www.annistonstar.com/the-daily-home/free/walter-williams-blacks-of-yesteryear-and-today-column/article-15cc80ce-1f9f-11eb-b21f-275b73f20ca6.html>

[13] Hogberg, David (2011). Walter Williams for Christmas. The American Spectator. <https://spectator.org/walter-williams-for-christmas/>

[14] Williams, Walter E. 2020. The Walter E. Williams Proclamation of Pardon Granted To European-Americans. Economic Policy Journal.

<https://www.economicpolicyjournal.com/2020/12/the-walter-e-williams-proclamation-of.html>

UNCOMPLICATING A COMPLICATED WORLD: THE SHINING LEGACY OF WALTER E. WILLIAMS

by Tarnell S. Brown

Not long ago, I was looking through my inbox to find some document or the other that had been emailed to me when I noticed a message from my friend Amy Willis at

“YOU SEE, THERE ARE NOT MANY ECONOMISTS WHO LOOK LIKE ME [1], AND FEW OF ANY SHADE SPOKE AS CLEARLY AGAINST THE DETERMINANTS OF PUBLIC POLICY THAT CREATED A CYCLE OF IMPOVERISHMENT FOR MINORITIES THAN DID DR. WILLIAMS.”

Liberty Fund. There is, it must be noted, nothing unusual in that, as I contribute to the Fund’s EconLog from time to time, and she sometimes messages me with ideas that our readers might find of interest. On this occasion, she surprised me with a most unexpected honor; an invitation to contribute to a written roundtable on the legacy of Walter E. Williams. This is indeed an honor, and I ask the reader to forgive my fervor and briefly indulge my excitement at presenting this to you. You see, there are not many economists who look like me [1], and few of any shade spoke as clearly against the determinants of public policy that created a cycle of impoverishment for minorities than did Dr. Williams.

Few would dispute, at least those acting in good faith, the idea that our nation has a long and troubled history with regard to its racial minorities. The great grandson of slaves, Williams would have occasion to experience these troubles himself. While his childhood in Philadelphia seems to have been absent of many of the turmoils suffered by his brethren in other corners of America, his

time in the army stationed at Fort Stewart in Hinesville, Georgia gave him his first taste of segregation and racially discriminatory policies. [2] Initially, Williams dealt with his discontent by pulling pranks to cause his superiors discomfort and engaging in a campaign of writing letters to highlight discrimination within the armed forces. While these actions accomplished little besides resulting in a court-martial in which he was found not guilty of the absurd charges levied against him, they set Williams down a path not only of questioning racial disparities in America, but also of fixing a stern eye towards their root causes. To say that Williams continued to go against the grain is a great understatement.

It is a long-held piece of common wisdom that the specter of systemic racism is a blight upon the fortunes of African Americans. It is also common within conservative and libertarian circles to hold that Dr. Williams rejected this view, but in truth, much as this writer accepts this as truth, so did Dr. Williams. As he noted, he grew up in a time where Negroes, as they were then called, were denied the natural rights that citizens should enjoy simply because they were assumed inferior because of their race. [3] Where Williams differed from the prophets of the common wisdom was in his determination of who was (and still is) to blame for the perpetuation of [discrimination](#).



In the troubled days of yesteryear, Williams notes, it was the legitimate goal of champions of civil rights to secure equality under the law for racial minorities. Blacks were restricted, by the very laws that should have ensured protection of rights, from voting, freedom of travel and association, and basic rights of contract. [4] These restrictions were violations of the American norms of

private property, limited government, and rule of law long enjoyed by the enfranchised class. A succession of court, legislative, and municipal battles against entrenched interests were successful in securing those basic rights for those who were not members of the preferred majority. The problem then became, as Williams saw it, the well-meaning but ultimately futile attempts of civil rights thinkers to resolve any residual remnants of racial discrimination with further legal action.

It is important to understand that Williams does not claim that racism no longer exists. Instead, what he is saying is that absent legal barriers to advancement, resources spent in the service of fighting discrimination are wasted. Why are they wasted? The answer is relatively simple, as these resources would probably be better utilized fighting the same problem within the market. [5] While discrimination imposes costs against those who are the victims of it, absent the artificial protections of state legitimacy, it also imposes costs upon the party that is doing the discriminating. Without those protections, the costs of racial discrimination cannot be hidden behind the veneer of law, or easily shifted to other parties.

Williams also utilizes the tools of economic analysis to demonstrate how good intentions result in the very thing they are meant to guard against. If, for example, the poor quality of [education](#) among Blacks is seen as a civil rights problem, then obviously the answer is to apportion more public dollars to bolstering majority Black schools, hiring more Black administrators, and hiring more Black teachers. The problem with this is that it has been tried ad nauseum, and it has failed spectacularly. Instead, Williams would argue that these resources would be better served finding free market alternatives to a failed system of public education, optimally constructed by local stakeholders who both understand their local communities and have something to gain from their improvement. [6] It would also ameliorate a nasty side effect of such efforts; the de facto segregation of minority students into failing schools.

The most important thing Williams demonstrated was that affirmative action robbed African Americans of the power and responsibility of their own agency. He revealed

in the fact that since the Civil Rights Act, African Americans had made the greatest gains of any racial group in America and in the shortest period of time. He noted that if the 2008 income of African Americans were taken as the gross domestic product of a separate nation, Black America would be the 18th richest nation in the world. [7] This also represents the jumping off point for his greatest departure from the common wisdom. As Dr. Williams notes, some 30% of the African American population has been left behind despite the gains of Blacks in general, and the poverty rate among African Americans hovers at or around 30%. As social science continues to demonstrate, poverty is one of the biggest determinants of crime.

This modern poverty, Williams posited, it's quite different from the poverty of yesteryear. While the poverty of his youth was simply an economic reality that one's family learned to deal with, this modern poverty is the result of many corrosive factors including, as William notes, a lack of family. [8] His analysis showed a high degree of correlation between growing up with a single parent, lack of educational attainment, and criminal activity. Naturally a combination of the lack of skills resulting from poor education and the limited employment market that results from criminal records creates a cycle of recidivism and poverty that often lasts throughout generations.



While Williams did not deny that there are institutional factors and such social institutions as police departments that lead to disparities in arrest and prosecution, he remained skeptical this could explain larger problems within minority communities. Once again, utilizing the

tools of economic analysis, he showed the Academy and policymakers that it was in fact their well-meaning paternalism that led to corrosive elements within minority communities. Moreover, policies such as minimum wage laws and occupational licensing create barriers to entry that discourage the spirit of entrepreneurship within the poorest elements of society. Actually, laws and policies such as these, while seemingly a manner of helping minorities and the poor, were originally instituted to price undesirable individuals out of the labor market. [9] Recall that earlier we noted that discriminatory laws often hide the true price of discrimination and the cost that they impose upon those discriminated against. Williams was instrumental in showing that this paradigm holds for any types of laws that provide a group with special status, even if the intent is to right a historical wrong.

It has been a great privilege to provide some small insight into the overwhelming legacy of Walter E. Williams. Of course, I do not agree with all of the observations he made over the course of his long, distinguished career, but he was vastly instrumental in showing us that the best solutions to the racial problems that bedevil us don't come from the government who all too often caused a problem in the first place. They are properly found within the free market, which, with all of its imperfections, imposes costs upon those who unjustly discriminate against others based on race, religion, sexuality or for any reason at all. I can only hope that we have learned enough from him to continue and improve upon his work.

[1] For perspective, see the American Economic Association's *Report of the Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in The Economics Profession (CSMGEP)* (2017)

[2] Williams, Walter E. (2010). *Up From the Projects: An Autobiography* (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press), p. 38

[3] Williams, Walter E. "Who's behind Institutional Racism?" Daily Journal, Aug 7, 2020, https://www.djournal.com/opinion/walter-williams-whos-behind-institutional-racism/article_c3c9bdc4-6eea-5514-a891-79c3a7f5bf1a.html

[4] Williams, Walter E. "Affirmative Action can't be Mended." *Cato Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 1997)

[5] Williams, Walter E. (2011) *Race and Economics: How Much can be Blamed on Discrimination?* vol. no. 599;599., (Stanford, Calif : Hoover Institution Press).

[6] Williams, Walter E. (1995) *Do the Right Thing: The People's Economist Speaks*. (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press).

[7] Williams, Walter E. (2015) *American Contempt for Liberty*. (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press).

[8] *ibid*

[9] *ibid*

RESPONSE

by Harold Black

The five essays on the legacy of Walter Williams pay tribute to a voice that made people think about important social and economic issues. Williams argued passionately that the free market and capitalism were the best methods for addressing those issues, and these essays highlight his arguments. Boudreaux's is the most personal, his being a close friend and colleague of Williams. It is a poignant remembrance and has examples of Williams' scholarship as well as his humanity. Brown's essay is valuable in that it traces Williams' life from his early years when his ideas were being formed. His essay analyzes Williams' view about the legal impediments that restricted Blacks' civil rights and the problems inherent in subsequent legal actions to resolve these problems. I am reminded of what my father once told me when I decided to apply for admission to the University of Georgia. He said that if we were not qualified, then such laws would be redundant. In the beginning of his essay, Brown mentions that there are few scholars who look like him and think like him. I would encourage him to join John Sibley Butler and me in Bob Woodson's [1776 Unites](#), which is a coalition of scholars and hands-on practitioners who believe much like Walter Williams. Here Brown would find people who look like him and most of whom are kindred spirits. John

Sibley Butler's piece is the most scholarly, drawing from Williams' academic work on capitalism and linking it to the work of other Black scholars and other thinkers. Again, the concepts of liberty, freedom, capitalism, and markets are detailed. I have yet to see a more complete, yet concise case for the importance of these concepts to better the economic condition of all people. DeGennaro's essay touches on the points made by the other essayists. It is interesting how the essays- written independently- contain many of the same quotes. DeGennaro, however, presents questions that he wishes Williams had expounded upon, including the relation of capital to labor and the worrisome trend in single-parent households for all races. It would indeed be interesting to see if other single parent households have the same attributes as blacks, rather than reflecting the overall decline in marriage, birthrates, and changing morals in today's society. However, that is the subject of further research.

Lastly, one underlying theme in Williams' writings is whether government actions have undermined the condition of Blacks in America. Much of the economic wellbeing of Blacks has worsened since the government enacted social programs, beginning with the War on Poverty. Bob Woodson has stated that government actions have created the poor as an economic good and a class of people who profit from servicing the impoverished. It is in that groups' best interest to keeping the poor poor. I know that Walter Williams would have agreed.

WALTER WILLIAMS: PROGRESSIVISM, AND SYSTEMIC RACISM

by Donald J. Boudreaux

It's a genuine honor to be among such esteemed scholars to discuss the ideas of Walter Williams. I agree, in detail and at large, with nearly all that is said in the opening essays. And I was struck by the fact that all of us, when

searching in Walter's work for what made him unique, identified largely the same traits. These traits are his humor, his command of the economic way of thinking, and, above all, his principle.

I'm struck as I ponder these three traits that each one is notably absent among the run of today's Progressives. Among most such people, humor is regarded as evidence of insensitivity, while economics is utterly foreign. As for Progressives' principles, these boil down to situation ethics – meaning, in practice, malignant pragmatism.

PROGRESSIVISM

It's easy to understand why a man of Walter's courage, knowledge, and wisdom found Progressivism to be so poisonous.

Yet, as I suggested near the end of my original essay in this series, it's unwise to reject a policy position merely because that position is one that is embraced by – or thought to be embraced by – Progressives. On some matters, Progressives might well stumble toward sensible conclusions that potentially can serve as grounds for useful alliances between them and classical liberals or conservatives.

Consider so-called “systemic racism” – a favorite trope of Progressives. Harold Black correctly described Walter as being skeptical of systemic racism. But Tarnell Brown is also correct that Walter, in his way, understood its reality.

What's going on? Was Walter inconsistent? No.

While Walter rightly criticized Progressives for their habit of explaining all group differences between whites and non-whites as resulting from systemic racism, Walter also understood that a great deal of still-active legislation –

national, state, and local – imposes differential disadvantages on those persons who are currently relatively disadvantaged. Minimum-wage legislation is only the most obvious such intervention. Although today often sold (and swallowed) as being a cure for poverty, minimum wages – by pricing many low-skilled workers out of jobs – are in fact a *contributor to* poverty. The same conclusion holds for several other interventions, including occupational-licensing requirements, land-use restrictions, and – perhaps above all – the K-12 government-schooling calamity.

That these interventions today are often supported by people whose motives are emphatically not racist does not render these interventions immune from the charge of *being* systematically racist. If these interventions' ill-consequences have – as they do – a distinctly racist profile, then the term “systemic racism” is appropriate.

An important difference between Walter and Progressives on this front is that Walter rightly rejected Progressives' childish belief that racist intentions are both sufficient *and necessary* for racist outcomes. It is *this* naïve understanding of systemic racism that Walter spurned. And while he might, to avoid verbal confusion, also have spurned the term “systemic racism,” he certainly understood that the economic, the political, and the legal system each can be perverted by policies that inflict disproportionate harm on blacks and other minority groups. Very much of Walter's life work was aimed at exposing such consequences.

REFLECTIONS ON ESSAYS DEDICATED TO PROFESSOR WALTER WILLIAMS

by John Sibley Butler

The essays on Walter Williams are like an anthropologist shifting through layers of earth with a small brush and scrapper in an attempt to discover how artifacts inform us about the people who lived in an ancient world. Walter Williams' basic ideas lay in his published

research and his public appearances. There are similar themes and lessons that were brought to the surface by my colleagues who used their intellectual scrappers to understand themes that run through the work of Professor Williams.

Donald J. Boudreaux's essay Informs us how ideas are passed from generation to generation and how they can influence future generations' outlooks on important issues of the economy; in this case, Boudreaux listens to a black scholar who had an interesting story on how the discipline of Economics modeled the world. Already leaning toward Economics, Walter Williams provided the incentive for Boudreaux to think about questions of the economy in different ways. Does government destroy poverty or does it ensure its continuation? How can a scholar of Economics see economic models, and their outcomes, in such a way that is so different from flow of ideas from the mainstream? Can it be that labor unions are bad and that people are responsible for themselves? Can certain government policies make things worse? How does one understand how to put liberty at the center of economic thought when there are so many policies designed by government, which are supposed to protect the people? **The lesson that Boudreaux's analysis reveals is that as scholars construct their expectations of the economy, they are grounded in a perspective which guides their thoughts. In Williams' case, liberty and markets are the things that move and shape the economy.**

Tarnell S. Brown's essay juxtaposes the socialization of Walter Williams, the racism and opportunity exclusion that he experienced as a youth, with the reality that Williams did not see those dynamics as denying the racial progress of black Americans. As Brown notes, "To say that Williams continued to go against the grain is a matter of great understanding." Williams understood that changing laws is only the start, and that the continued poverty of people has to be understood in the strategies that they chose in the face of racism and discrimination. In a real sense, Brown is tapping into an underlying theme which has been passed down by economically successful blacks since free blacks created

communities of success. This theme appears in my work, [Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans](#) and other works such as Price M Cobbs [My American Life](#). The basic idea is that there is an internal force which directs people to create their own entitlements, which are different from government entitlements that place people in economic chains and

“THE LESSON THAT TARNELL BROWN BRINGS OUT IS THAT WHAT SEEM TO BE CONTRADICTIONS IN WILLIAMS WORK IS REALLY WILLIAMS’ ATTEMPT TO BRING INTO THE EQUATION HOW SUCCESSFUL BLACKS HAVE HELPED THEMSELVES BY UNDERSTANDING LIBERTY, THE FREE MARKET, AND SUCCESSFUL BLACKS SINCE THE 1700S.”

keep them from moving. Through history and learning, people look into their inner selves to produce that which all are entitled to- life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Government will never produce those things. Price Cobbs synthesizes this well when he talks about generations of Blacks who have looked within to entitle themselves. It comes through education In one's history, Identifying role models who are doers rather than complainers, and understanding how self-entitlement is standing on the shoulders of those who have understood themselves and that strategy. In his own way, Williams utilized economics to argue that generations of Blacks in America have been successful as a result of examining their history and those who were successful in the past. This is amazing for Williams because he was not raised in that group of self-help blacks who for generations have looked into themselves and created paths forward for future generations. The more we look back, the more models of success there are. Over the years, scholarship which documents successful models for black Americans have been replaced by models of failure which must be solved by

seven languages. Williams' challenge was to lead people with different skills through a thought process that was difficult, even alien, to their experiences and worldviews.

Williams did his best, dedicating his career to revealing economic reality to people with little or no formal training in economics. Was he successful? Suppose we could ask Professor Williams what we should think about his ideas. How would he respond? No one knows for sure, but I will hazard a guess. I suspect he would say, "Don't ask me what I think. Think about it for yourself." And how would he want us to respond? Again, I will hazard a guess. He would want us to say, "Thanks to your work, Professor Williams, I am better equipped to think about this for myself."

STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION: CLOSING REMARKS ON CONTINUING WILLIAMS' LEGACY

by Tarnell S. Brown

And so we have come to the end of our series, but it is an end that portends new beginnings. While Dr. Williams no longer walks among us, his spirit still informs the work of such thinkers as Harold A. Black, John Sibley Butler, Donald J. Boudreaux and Ramon P. DeGenarro. What I have found interesting over the course of this discussion is that while there were slight differences in perspective among the scholars honoring Williams' legacy, certain themes - such as skepticism of public policy and the defining role of personal choice - informed each. This speaks to the unyielding consistency of Williams' long history of scholarship. To Williams, as to the members of the discussion, only outcomes matter. This is at the heart of the economic way of thinking.

Professor Black provided insight into Williams' mistrust of income [redistribution](#) and the War on Poverty. He correctly points out that among those who finish high school, find gainful employment, reside in two-parent homes, and stay out of the criminal justice system,

poverty rates remain in the single digits. This holds true without regard to race and is critical because studies have shown that poverty is the single largest determinant of crime, and crime is one of the largest determinants of poverty. A vicious circle can be difficult to escape. Social policies that ignore these realities often result in what economist Paul Craig Roberts and legal scholar Lawrence M. Stratton have poignantly termed "the tyranny of good intentions." There is simply no input level at which good intentions negate ineffective policy.



While much of Don Boudreaux's contribution focuses his admiration of Williams born through many years of friendship and working together as colleagues, he importantly notes Williams' observation that policies such as minimum wage remove the costs of indulging discriminatory preferences. In the case of minimum wage laws, [that was part of their original purpose](#), but this holds true even with laws explicitly intended to assist the disadvantaged. As Arrow points out, [things such as wage differentials and discrimination in credit and housing markets are antithetical to the profit-maximization of forward concerns](#), and can only exist as a function of the taste-based preferences of insular social networks. Expressed in the simplest terms, left to its own devices, the market will weed out discriminatory actions as economically inefficient. Such actions can only be undertaken when externalities shield decision makers from bearing the costs of discriminatory network preferences. Incentives matter, and the incentives of public policy are not necessarily equilibrated to the incentives of the market.

John Butler took Williams' view that the market held the key to the long-run success of minorities a step further.

Capitalism has rendered irrelevant the historical methods of obtaining wealth and independence; namely, looting, plundering and enslaving ones' fellows. While capitalism certainly has its flaws, they are relative and only magnified when compared to heaven and non-existent utopian societies. When compared to other economic systems, market societies demonstrate an undeniable history of higher per capita incomes, and as they require the protection of individual liberties to remain viable, greater levels of freedom. I feel obligated to point out that "true capitalism" does not exist any more than "true communism," but even our flawed mixed-market approximation has resulted in gains for the descendants of slaves that would be beyond imagination under any other system. This does not mean that the market is beyond criticism, and we must continue to have that honest discussion, but it has proven more beneficial to the interests of minorities than any other single vehicle. We must remember that much of the purpose of discriminatory laws such as Jim Crow was to prevent the participation of minorities within the wider market.

The theme of Ramon DeGennaro's contribution is a perfect motif for my concluding remarks; our work is not yet done. He posits that more work needs to be done on the juxtaposition between capital and labor, and how the tension between the two combine with individual liberty and personal choice to create prosperity within the market. Williams, he notes, started that discussion, especially concerning how the dissolution of the Black family structure has created a permanent disadvantage for a large segment of the minority society, but he urges that more research be done in this area. This is a credible plea, in my point of view, and I believe that others will rise to the challenge. This conversation has highlighted other issues that require further, continuous discussion as well, and I look forward to having those discussions at the Williams Conference that is the result of this colloquium. Also, having had the benefit of viewing Dr. Black's remarks prior to finishing my own, I must say that I am more than amenable to accepting the challenge of joining him and Dr. Butler in their work at 1776 Unites. We have started a good conversation here, but it is not yet concluded.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Harold A. Black](#) is Emeritus Professor of Finance at the University of Tennessee. His undergraduate degree is from the University of Georgia where its Terry College of Business has announced a named professorship in his honor and the University is naming its new freshman dormitory for him and two others who integrated its freshman class in 1966. His Phd is from the Ohio State University. His faculty appointments include the University of Florida, Howard University and the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. He was appointed by President Carter to serve on the first National Credit Union Administration Board. He has published extensively in the leading journals in business and economics. He served on the boards of two of the nation's largest financial institutions and his consulting clients are among the leading law firms and financial institutions in the country.

[Donald J. Boudreaux](#) is Professor of Economics at George Mason University and Getchell Chair at George Mason's Mercatus Center. He is the author of, among other books, *Globalization* (2008) and *The Essential Hayek* (2014), as well as of several academic papers and popular essays on economics, law, and public policy. He writes a regular column for AIER and blogs daily at [Cafe Hayek](#).

[John Sibley Butler](#) is the J. Marion West Chair in Constructive Capitalism and Professor of Management and Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. His books include *All That We Can Be* (with Charles Moskos and winner of the Washington Monthly's Political Book Award), *Global Issues in Technology Transfer* (with Dave Gipson) and *Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics*. The latter work concentrates on economically secure black Americans since the inception of the country and how they created private schools, enterprises to create one of the most interesting economical secure groups in America and by embracing entrepreneurship and liberty, their offspring are in their third and fourth generation of college matriculation.

[Ramon P. DeGennaro](#) is the Haslam College of Business Professor of Banking and Finance at the University of Tennessee. He holds a Ph.D. in Finance from the Ohio State University. He has served as a Visiting Scholar at the Federal Reserve Banks of Atlanta and Cleveland, and at the American Institute of Economic Research. Professor DeGennaro has published more than 50 refereed articles in academic journals, including the Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis; Journal of Money, Credit and Banking; Journal of Banking and Finance; Journal of Empirical Finance; and Financial Management. He speaks frequently at conferences, civic groups, and business meetings. He is the author of The Great Courses' lecture series How the Stock Market Works and International Economic Institutions: Globalism Vs. Nationalism, with combined sales of over \$2,000,000.

[Tarnell S. Brown](#) is an Atlanta, GA area economist and public policy analyst. He is a periodic contributor to Liberty Fund's EconLog.

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