

Remembering Walter Williams, Friend and Mentor

met economist and professor Walter Williams when I interviewed him while hosting a local TV show in Cleveland. We discussed a number of topics but focused on race-based preferences, aka affirmative action. Williams adamantly opposed it, still an unpopular position to take, but especially back then and especially for a Black person. He calmly explained how affirmative action causes a mismatch between a student and his or her ability to succeed on a campus more competitive than would have been the case but for the race-based preferential admission. Without racial preferences, I said, schools like Harvard might have few or no Blacks. To this Williams said, "So?"

For decades, Ebony magazine, the Black monthly magazine, sat prominently on the coffee tables in Black households across America. No longer owned by the original family, it has lost its clout. But for years, Ebony featured the "100 Most Influential Black Americans," until the large number of "influential" Black Americans caused them to rename the feature "The 100+ Most Influential Black Americans."

And every year, despite the expanded number of Black influentials, Ebony omitted Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, economist Thomas Sowell and Williams. Never mind that Williams, to the best of my knowledge, still holds the distinction as the only Black economics professor to chair an economics department of a non-Black college or university. But he could not make the cut in Ebony.

In 2001, I wrote: "Someday, many of their critics will apologize. Who am I talking about?"

"Two economists, who happen to be Black, Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams.

"For over 30 years, Thomas Sowell, currently with the Hoover Institution, and Walter Williams, chairman of the economics department at George Mason University, led the charge against the 'victicrat' mindset. Through decades of weekly columns, books, speeches and lectures before often-hostile crowds, they long argued that racism cannot be blamed for poverty, crime, illegitimacy, and under-performing schools. ...

"Sowell and Williams urge Blacks to reject welfare in favor of self-help -- breaking the monopoly of public education, privatization of Social Security, and the adherence to responsible moral, personal, and sexual behavior. So who's the Uncle Tom? Those proposing the same old 'solutions,' or those, like Sowell and Williams, recommending real change?"

In 2017, I wrote: "How does Ebony justify excluding economist and writer Walter Williams, former chairman of the economics department of George Mason University, where he still teaches?"

"Raised by a single mother, he lived in Philadelphia's Richard Allen housing projects. He served as a private in the Army before earning a bachelor's degree at a state university, followed by a master's and a Ph.D. in economics at UCLA. Williams has written a dozen books on economics and race, including the inspirational 'Up From the Projects: An Autobiography,' and was recently the subject of a documentary about his life.

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"The exclusion of people like Clarence Thomas, Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams explains why there's no serious discussion in the Black community about government dependency; school choice; the damage done by high taxes, excessive regulation and laws like minimum wage; and why Blacks should rethink their allegiance to the Democratic Party."

In 2019, I wrote: "I have known Sowell and Williams for nearly 30 years. Their presence loomed large this weekend in Washington, D.C. For years, they were lonely voices questioning Blacks' devotion to the Democratic Party. They have long argued that the welfare state has destabilized families, encouraging women 'to marry the government' and men to abandon their financial and moral responsibilities. They have long argued against the job-destroying impact of the minimum wage. They have long argued that one's fate is determined not by racism but by one's willingness to invest in oneself through education, hard work and sacrifice."

"Turning Point's Black Leadership Summit shows that Sowell's and Williams' books, columns, television appearances and speeches have spawned a generation of hopeful young Black men and women who believe in themselves. These bright, energetic young people get it. As then-First Lady Barbara Bush said, 'Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House, but on what happens inside your house.'"

About his best friend of 50 years, fellow economist Thomas Sowell recently wrote: "As an economist, Walter Williams never got the credit he deserved. His book 'Race and Economics' is a must-read introduction to the subject. Amazon has it ranked 5th in sales among civil rights books, 9 years after it was published. ..."

"The other side of Walter came out in relation to his wife, Connie. She helped put him through graduate school -- and after he received his Ph.D., she never had to work again, not even to fix his breakfast. ..."

"We may not see his like again. And that is our loss."

RIP, professor Walter E. Williams. Thank you for gracing the world with your presence.

Larry Elder is a bestselling author and nationally syndicated radio talk show host. His latest book, "The New Trump Standard," is available in paperback from Amazon.com and for Nook, Kindle, iBooks and GooglePlay. To find out more about Larry Elder, or become an "Elderado," visit www.LarryElder.com. Follow Larry on Twitter @LarryElder. To read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.

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