

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Luther Williams

PERSON

Williams, Luther , 1940-

Alternative Names: Williams, Luther , 1940-;

Life Dates: August 19, 1940-

Place of Birth: Wedgeworth, Alabama

Residence: Chesterfield, Missouri (from ? to ?)

Occupations: Biologist; Academic Administrator

Biographical Note

Biologist and academic administrator Luther Williams was born on August 19, 1940 in Wedgeworth, Alabama to Mattie Wallace Williams and Roosevelt Williams, the third of nine children. Williams grew up fascinated by living systems and was encouraged by his fifth grade math and science teacher to pursue his interest in science. After graduating from Hale County Training School in Greensboro, Alabama, Williams attended Miles College, earning his B.S. degree in biology in 1961. Two years later, Williams received his M.S. degree from Atlanta University, where he studied under Dr. Mary Logan Reddick. Williams was awarded an NIH pre-doctoral fellowship to study at Purdue University in 1966, enabling him to work with Dr. Frederick C. Neidhardt and earn his Ph.D. degree in molecular biology in 1968.

Within the next decade, Williams continued his work at Purdue University by 1979, he was named a full professor of biology at Purdue University. Williams conducted a significant amount of his scientific research while at Purdue University, Washington University (while serving as the Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences) and the University of Colorado, at which he served as the vice president for academic affairs of the University of Colorado system. His research focused on the properties and cellular regulation of aminoacyl-transfer ribonucleic acid synthetases, key enzymes in the biological process of translating the genetic code to usable proteins.

In 1984, Williams was named the president of Atlanta University. He then served as the chair of the White House Biotechnology Science Coordinating Committee, the deputy director of the National Institute of General Medical Science of the National Institutes of Health, and assistant director of education and human resources at the National Science Foundation. After serving as the William T. Kemper Director of Education and Interpretation at the Missouri

Botanical Garden from 2001 to 2005, Williams was invited to join the faculty of Tuskegee University as the dean of graduate studies and research and then provost and vice president of academic affairs. He was subsequently reappointed to provost and vice president for academic affairs at Tuskegee University in 2010.

Williams has been recognized for his leadership and his dedication to creating opportunities for minorities in the sciences. He received the Presidential Distinguished Executive Rank Award by President Clinton in 1993. He was also named distinguished alumnus of the School of Science, Purdue University in 1997. In addition, he received the William A. Hinton Research Training Award from the American Society for Microbiology in 2000, and a number of honorary doctorate degrees. He has contributed to over seventy academic papers and professional scientific journals and more than twenty articles concerning the status of science education in the United States. He was also named one of the fifty most important Blacks in science research by Spectrum magazine in 2005, and was appointed a member of the Council of Councils, Office of the Director, the National Institutes of Health in 2009.

Williams lives with his wife, Constance Marion. The couple has two adult children, Mark and Monique Williams.

Luther Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 11, 2011.

Related Entries

Williams, Willie Diggins []
Stepmother

Wallace, Ellen [GRANDCHILDOf]
Maternal Grandmother

Wallace, Nathan [GRANDCHILDOf]
Maternal Grandfather

Williams, Robert T. [GRANDCHILDOf]
Paternal Grandfather

Holloway, Rubye J. [SIBLINGOf]
Sister

Williams, Willie [SIBLINGOf]
Brother

Williams, James W. [SIBLINGOf]
Brother

Williams, Monique M. [PARENTOf]
Daughter

Williams, Roosevelt [CHILDOf]
Father

Williams, Emma Snow [GRANDCHILDOf]
Paternal Grandmother

Williams, Mattie Wallace [CHILDOf]
Mother

Williams, Arthur L. [SIBLINGOF]
Brother

Williams, Charles E. [SIBLINGOF]
Brother

Williams, Mark S. [PARENTOF]
Son

Williams, II, Roosevelt [SIBLINGOF]
Brother

Calhoun, Emma [SIBLINGOF]
Sister

Williams, Robert T. [SIBLINGOF]
Brother

Ellis, Annie [GRANDCHILDOF]
Great-grandmother (P)

Flatwoods Elem Sch [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Hale County Training High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to 1957]

Angeles Mesa Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to 1961]

B.S. Biology and Chemistry

Atlanta University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to 1963]

M.S. Biology

Purdue University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to 1968]

Ph.D. Molecular Biology

State University of New York at Stony Brook [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Postdoctoral Fellow

Washington University (St. Louis, Missouri) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Dean and professor

University of Colorado at Boulder [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Vice president and Dean

Atlanta University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

President

National Institutes of Health [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Deputy director and special assistant

National Science Foundation [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Science advisor and assistant director

Missouri Botanical Garden [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Director of science education

Tuskegee University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Provost/ VP; Dean and professor

Miles College [MEMBEROf]
Trustee

National Institutes of Health [MEMBEROf]

St. Louis Community College Foundation Board [MEMBEROf]
Board Member