

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

PERSON

Williams, Luther, 1940-

Alternative Names: Luther Williams;

Life Dates: August 19, 1940-

Place of Birth: Wedgeworth, Alabama, USA

Residence: Chesterfield, MO

Occupations: Biologist;

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

Flatwoods Elementary School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Hale County High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Angeles Mesa Elementary School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.S. Biology and Chemistry

Clark Atlanta University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

M.S. Biology

Purdue University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Ph.D. Molecular Biology

State University of New York at Stony Brook [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Postdoctoral Fellow

Washington University [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to 1968]

Dean and professor

University of Colorado at Boulder [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1974 to ?]

Vice president and Dean

Atlanta University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

President

National Institute of Health (NIH) [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1940 to ?]

Deputy director and special assistant

National Science Foundation (NSF) [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Science advisor and assistant director

Missouri Botanical Garden [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1965 to ?]

Director of science education

Tuskegee University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1964 to ?]

Provost/ VP; Dean and professor

Purdue University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1970 to 1980]

Professor of Biology

Atlanta University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1984 to 1987]

President

National Science Foundation (NSF) [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1989 to 2000]

Assistant Director

Missouri Botanical Garden [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2000 to 2005]

Director

Tuskegee University [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2005 to ?]

Professor and Provost

Miles College [MEMBEROf]
[from 1971 to 1972]

Trustee

National Institutes of Health (NIH) [MEMBEROf]
[from 1982 to 1984]

St. Louis Community College Foundation Board [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member