

The Individualist Economist

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Walter Williams died today. Or, by the time you read this, yesterday.

Williams was a major figure in economics education, instrumental in building an economics program at George Mason University. Plus, he popularized economics for a wider audience with books, columns, and regular guest radio appearances on Rush Limbaugh's show.

Dinesh D'Souza, in his video tribute, called Williams "an economist, an individualist, and an African-American conservative" when such people were rare. Especially the African-American variety.

Now, Williams' main themes were not so much conservative as libertarian, citing Frédéric Bastiat

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a whole lot more than Edmund Burke. But D'Souza no doubt indicates that when he calls Williams an individualist. Consider it a euphemism for libertarian.

And Williams certainly was an Individual — an



individualist in more than just the political sense — though, we saw his resistance to mob pressure and groupthink most clearly in the realm of ideology.

He could certainly have gotten wider praise had he stuck closer to the culturally dominant notion of what an African-American intellectual's role was supposed to be. But instead of pushing "discrimination" as the major factor in differences of wealth and health outcomes in ethnic and racial groups in America, he insisted that actions have consequences, constantly reiterating the major themes of the classical liberal economists Adam Smith and Milton Friedman: people provide greater benefit to the general welfare when they marshal their own resources in a private property/free trade framework than when they pretentiously talk about the "public good" through special government programs.

When two people trade, both gain.

In politics, it's too often about taking from some to give to others.

By being himself, going his own way, Walter Williams himself provided a great example of how to serve the common good.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.