

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Willie

PERSON

Willie, Charles Vert, 1927-

Alternative Names: Charles Willie;

Life Dates: October 8, 1927-January 11, 2022

Place of Birth: Dallas, Texas, USA

Occupations: Sociologist; Education Professor

Biographical Note

Professor and sociologist Charles Vert Willie was born in Dallas, Texas, on October 8, 1927. Willie attended Morehouse College, where he graduated in 1948. The following year, he received a master's degree from Atlanta University, and in 1957, he obtained a Ph.D. degree in sociology from Syracuse University. At Syracuse, Willie served as chair of the Department of Sociology and vice president of the university, at a time when few African Americans were holding such positions. He then was hired by Harvard University in 1974, where he served as the Charles William Eliot Professor of Education at the Graduate School of Education.

Charles Willie was one of the nation's leading black sociologists. His expertise was in the area of school desegregation. Accordingly, Willie served as a court-appointed master, expert witness, and consultant in many school desegregation cases. In 1975, Willie served as a court-appointed master in the Boston school desegregation case, and he later was retained to develop a controlled choice student assignment plan for Boston and several school districts. He was recognized in 1983 with the Society for the Study of Social Problems' Lee-Founders Award for effectively combining social research and social activism.

Willie was an applied sociologist concerned with solving social problems. He was the author or editor of more than thirty-five books and one hundred articles covering topics such as race relations, urban education, public health, community development, family life, and women's rights. His books include *A New Look at Black Families* (1976), *The Education of African-Americans* (1991), *Theories of Human Social Action* (1994), and *Mental Health, Racism and Sexism* (1995). Willie served as vice president of the American Sociological Association and as president of the Eastern Sociological Society. In addition, Willie also served on the boards of the Social Science Research Council, the Fetzer Foundation, the Dana Greely Foundation, and the Boston Museum of Science, among others; the technical advisory board of the Maurice Falk Medical

Fund; and, by the appointment of President Jimmy Carter, the President's Commission on Mental Health.

Willie formally retired from Harvard in 1999 but continued to teach part-time for another decade. He also served as the vice president of the House of Deputies in the Episcopal Church USA, where he preached the sermon for the ordination of the first 11 women priests in the Episcopal Church. Willie received honorary doctoral degrees from fifteen colleges and universities including Syracuse University, Haverford College, the Episcopal Divinity School, Emerson College, Morgan State University, and Beacon College. Morehouse College awarded him the Bennie Service Award, and Syracuse University awarded Willie its George Arents Pioneer Medal and later honored him with the Chancellor's Citation Lifetime Achievement Award. The American Sociological Association awarded Willie its DuBois-Johnson-Frazier Award, the William Foote Whyte Distinguished Career Award, and the W.E.B. DuBois Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award. The Eastern Sociological Society honored him with its Merit Award and established an annual award in his name.

Charles Willie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on February 13, 2001.

Willie passed away on January 11, 2022, at the age of 94.

Related Entries

N.W. Harllee Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Lincoln High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

diploma

Morehouse College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Clark Atlanta University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Syracuse University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Syracuse University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1950 to 1974]

Harvard University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1974 to ?]

Judge Baker Children's Center [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Boston Science Museum [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

American Sociological Association [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Episcopal Church of U.S. [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]