



Walter Williams: Economist of Liberty

Lesson Plan

This document is addressed to the instructor. Other documents in this lesson packet are addressed to students.

This lesson provides an overview of the life and work of African American economist **Walter E. Williams**, one of the most prominent libertarian commentators on issues of race, poverty, and labor policy from the 1980s until his death in 2020. Born and raised in Philadelphia, Williams overcame many personal and political barriers on his journey from the North Philly housing projects to a distinguished professorship. A prolific writer, Williams published for both academic and popular audiences, though his great love was teaching economics. Throughout his life, a network of devoted friends and family made his success possible.

Prompt:

Present students with the questions posed in the “Opening Questions” document, either by circulating the document itself or leading an all-class discussion about some or all of the questions. Ask students to write down their answers or, for class discussion, record responses from the class so these answers can be reconsidered after the presentation.

Share the prepared PowerPoint presentation with students. Select from the list of “Critical Thinking Questions,” and “Multiple-Choice Questions” to engage students in dialogue and measure their understanding. If time allows, supplement the presentation with Williams’s own writings or other resources listed below. The “Critical Thinking Questions” document also includes prompts for more in-depth research and writing assignments.

Vocabulary:

ascendent, automat, byzantine, counterintuitive, confiscate, cynical, dissident, economics, *laissez-faire*, libertarian, orthodoxy, socialism

Recommended Resources:

In addition to the PowerPoint presentation and the three “Questions” documents, this packet includes a list of classroom-appropriate “Videos” with further discussion questions, two primary sources mentioned in the presentation (“Letter to JFK” and “1975 Inquirer Article”), a copy of Williams’s essay “Minimum Wage, Maximum Folly,” a list of Standard Learning Objectives (“SLO”), and a guide to relevant “Woodson Principles.”

Essays by and about Williams are widely available online. His personal webpage, which he maintained until his death, contains links to many of his publications and media appearances, as well as resource he recommended to his own students: <http://walterewilliams.com/>

Williams’s autobiography, *Up from the Projects* (Hoover Institution Press, 2010), is appropriate for high school-level readers, and a relatively quick read at 160 pages.