



William Lloyd "Little Willie" Adams

January 5, 1914 - June 27, 2011

William Lloyd Adams, an iconic and influential entrepreneur, political activist, and philanthropist widely known as “Little Willie”, passed away of natural causes on June 27. He was 97 years old.

Born seven months before the outbreak of World War I on January 5, 1914, Mr. Adams left the North Carolina cotton Fields behind forever in 1929 and moved to Baltimore City as part of the Great Migration. With few employment opportunities available to him as a result of widespread racism and the Great Depression, Mr. Adams persuaded the head of a then illegal lottery operation to give him a chance as a low-level runner. He was just 16 years old.

With preternatural ability to process mathematic equations in his head and an indefatigable work ethic, Mr. Adams rapidly ascended the ranks of the lottery business. Then, while still in his 20s, he launched his own organization. As former Baltimore City Mayor Clarence “Du” Burns once remarked, Adams went from riding a bicycle to driving a Buick seemingly overnight, a success that made Mr. Adams a hero and inspiration throughout black Baltimore.

But almost as quickly as Mr. Adams made his way to the top, he made his exit from the illegal lottery enterprise. His true ambition was to become a legitimate businessman, a goal he fulfilled in historic and socially significant ways. During the course of his life, he financed scores of businesses, from

Pennsylvania Avenue nightclubs to a multi-state real estate development company, from one of the East Coast's premiere live music venues to the first black- owned and operated corporation to successfully go public on Wall Street.

As determined as he was to succeed personally, Mr. Adams was even more dedicated to cultivating others. He supported countless African Americans with dreams of business and political success. And he did so not only with his finances, but also with his reputation for honesty, integrity, and loyalty, no matter the price. Mr. Adams once said, "Most of my time is used to help Blacks develop and understand how to be successful in business and how to become economically secure." Among the success stories he helped to make possible was that of Harry Cole, who broke the political color barrier in 1954 by becoming the first African American to win a seat in the Maryland State Senate.

Mr. Adams also broke ground in the legal arena, waging the successful fight to desegregate public sporting facilities, including golf courses, and winning two Supreme Court Cases, one of which ensured the right of immunity to those who testify before Congress.

Mr. Adams didn't do it all alone. In 1935, he married Victorine Quille, a schoolteacher who was on the verge of making her own major mark. Money alone, she realized, wouldn't be enough to elect African Americans office. Even the best-financed black candidate stood a chance of winning a majority of white voters What the black community needed, she understood, was more voters and she set to work drawing African Americans onto the election roles. She went on to become the first elected black female on the Baltimore City Council, where she championed the rights and needs of the poor.

Because his education was interrupted early, Mr. Adams soon learned the

need to equip himself educationally. Even while succeeding in business, he chose to continue his education until he graduated from Douglass Senior High School, having attended evening classes. He attended Cortez Peters Business School, Morgan State University and was ultimately awarded an honorary Doctorate of Letters from Morris Brown College in 1979.

Not surprisingly, William and Victorine Adams invested heavily, both in terms of time and treasure, in the region's young African Americans, stating a foundation that helped- and continues to help- students earn the education that Mr. Adams so valued, so much so that he himself earned a high school degree at night well after he had made it in business. Mr. Adams' loving wife of 72 years, Victorine, passed away in 2006.

It has been said that the man who leaves the world a better place never leaves. By this measure, William L. Adams and his inspirational legacy shall endure.

Mr. Adams is survived by his daughter, Gertrude Venable, and granddaughter, Trudy Venable. He will also be missed by his dear and trusted friend Theo Rodgers, several nieces, nephews, and cousins, caregivers Kimberly Smith and Marty Strauss, and the caring people at Roland Park Place.

Cemetery Details

Arbutus

1101 Sulphur Spring Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21227

Previous Events

Service

JUN **30**. 10:00 AM (ET)

March Funeral Homes - West Baltimore
4300 Wabash Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21215
(410) 542-2400
info@marchfh.com

Tribute Wall



“ *William Lloyd "Little Willie" Adams*

October 13, 2022 at 08:33 AM



“ *Please accept my sympathy for your loss. During this time, may all be comforted by the wonderful hope at Revelation 21:4: "And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes and death will be no more. Neither mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."*

A. Robinson - June 30, 2011 at 06:03 PM



“ *We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.*

March Funeral Homes - June 30, 2011 at 10:22 AM



the first black man of influence and power in baltimore, we are left stronger and better because of him and his wife, awesome

ricardo butler - July 04, 2012 at 11:10 AM