

Louis (James) Charles Williams (1928 – 2011)

James was the 3rd of seven children, born to Peter & Cleola Williams, on January 8th, 1928, at home in Vallejo, California. In 1919, the Williams Family was one of the first Black American families to settle & prosper in the City of Vallejo. James attended McKinley Elementary, Vallejo Jr. High School, Vallejo Senior High School, & received his Associate of Arts Degree in Business at Vallejo Junior College.

He began a lifetime of hard work at the age of 9, when he & his older brother, Jasper, had one of the largest bi-daily newspaper routes in the City of Vallejo. At the age of 12, James had observed and helped his father, Peter, remodel and build several houses, learning skills of self-sufficiency. James learned the important values of family dedication, hard work, & land ownership, from the work ethic handed down to him, by two generations of Black California farmers. **His maternal Great Grandfather, William Whitney, an ex-slave**, purchased 10 acres of land, as an original settler in what is now, the [Colonel Allensworth Historic State Park](#), located in the Central Valley, in Tulare County. After leaving Allensworth, California, Whitney purchased two homes in Vallejo, California, in 1919, and started the Vallejo family history of property ownership. **His paternal Great Grandfather, Alvin Coffey, an ex-slave**, was a member of the **California Pioneer Society, an educator, and a philanthropist**. He homesteaded 240 acres of land as a successful & prosperous farmer, near Red Bluff, in Old Shasta County, California. James followed successfully in the footsteps of his great grandfathers, grandfathers, his parents; he purchased his home in the early 1950's and later purchased rental properties in Vallejo & Oakland, California, in the 1960's & 1970's.

In the 1940's, most black Americans worked at Mare Island Naval Shipyard, or as domestics in the private homes of white residents. **In 1946, after graduating from high school, "Jim" had the distinction of becoming one of the first Black Americans to work at the Executive Offices for a privately owned retail business located in downtown Vallejo.** He was initially hired as an inventory clerk. After a distinguished 43-year career, he retired in 1989, as the General Buyer for **Meyers' Jewelers**, a chain of jewelry stores located in Northern California. As the General Buyer, he interacted with reps from large corporations like General Electric and Westinghouse, who observed his knowledge & abilities in retail purchasing; there were employment offers over the years, but he was never tempted to leave Meyers Jewelers. **He was always grateful for employment opportunity given to him by Isadore & Lena Meyer, the original owners.** Over the decades he had earned the trust and respect of the Meyer family. He enjoyed the autonomy of being in the field between locations and the flexibility to "run his own show". His friendly and positive disposition was always received with warmth and appreciation by other employees, at all eight (8) locations; everyone knew "Jim". He maintained a close personal relationship with the Meyer patriarchs until their deaths. He was active in the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Family Movement (CFM), & delivered Meal on Wheels for 10 years after his retirement. He was happily married to Ursula, "Bia", for 62 years and was loved & respected by his children & grandchildren! He touched hundreds of lives during his 83 years as resident of Vallejo. He was **honored by over 400** grateful family, friends, and community members, who attended his funeral services! **HIS LEGACY CONTINUES!**

Ursula Bell Williams (1928 – 2016)

Ursula Theresa Bell, was the 7th and last child born to John and Margaret Bell, on 12/2/1928, at Charity Hospital in New Orleans, Louisiana. As part of the “Great American Migration”, she traveled North, by train with her mother & arrived in Vallejo, CA, in 1943, at the age of fifteen. She attended elementary & middle school in New Orleans. She graduated, Class of 1946 from Vallejo Senior High School where she met the love of her life, James Williams. She received her AA Degree from Vallejo Jr. College (now Solano Community College). James & Ursula were married on, “Juneteenth”, June 19th, 1949.

In 1949, Ursula’s first job was as a clerk typist at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard. She excelled and was the fastest typist and shorthand clerk in the office. Those work qualities were normally rewarded with a promotion to supervisor or the executive assistant to the Admiral’s office; however, she did not receive recognition for her excellent work, due to discrimination at the time. Confident of her talents, she did not let this discourage her. In 1954, while working full time, with 3 children ages 6 months, 2, & 4, she decided to enhance her education & pursue a career as a certified court reporter. Through sheer determination, and the committed support of her husband, she commuted by ferry from Vallejo to San Francisco to attend night school, 3-4 times a week, for 4 years! She graduated from the Academy of Stenographic Art, as a certified court reporter. The Court Reporters Board of California, established in 1951, has licensed 13,454 people since its inception; ***Ursula became a Certified Court Reporter, license - (CSR) #927, on 6/21/1958, making her a pioneer in the field. She was the first Black Female Certified Court Reporter in Solano County, and possibly in the entire State of California.*** She worked as a court reporter at Travis AFB and at Superior Court in Fairfield, California. After retiring as a court reporter, she began a 2nd career in politics, working as Staff Assistant to State Senator John Dunlap, Congressmen Robert Leggett & Vic Fazio, & U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer. She served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in the early 1980’s.

She was active in the following community organizations: a member of the Highlighters Social Club, a volunteer docent at the Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum, 1st Black member of Soroptimist International of Vallejo; on the Board of Directors of the Vallejo Girls Club & the Solano County Library Board of Directors; Lifetime Member of the NAACP, & President of the Solano County Catholic Social Service Auxiliary; she was a member of the National Council of Negro Women, Solano County Minority Coalition for Cancer Prevention, Vallejo Commission on Aging, Vallejo Special Committee for the Senior Citizen Center, & the Solano County Prevention of Abuse to Children. She was a Charter Member of the Solano County Chapter of The Links, Incorporated. As a community activist, she was awarded:

Humanitarian of the Year (1989, by the Navy City Elks in Vallejo)

Spirit of African Americans in Vallejo (1994, by American Savings Bank)

Women of Excellence (1994, Jack & Jill of America, (Oakland Bay Area Chapter)

Ursula was happily married to James, “Papa”, for 62 years and successfully raised & educated three children, Michelle, Kathleen, & Mark. She was an amazing example of a loving wife, mother, & friend to her children, grandchildren, & community members. **HER LEGACY CONTINUES!**