

About the Architect

Paul Revere Williams was born in 1894, to African-American parents who had recently pulled up roots in Tennessee and headed west toward the swaying palm trees and better economic opportunities of Los Angeles. When Paul was just two years old, his father died, and his mother's death just two years later cast him into the foster system. His foster mother encouraged his creative endeavors, but the fact remained that his African-American heritage would be a stigma he would carry with him wherever he went. Still, the young Paul dreamed of being a great architect, and he had no interest in giving up his dream without trying to reach it. After attaining an education, he began actively seeking work designing buildings and homes. In 1915, he was certified as a building contractor, and six years later he received his architects' license. Undeterred by the blatant racial discrimination he often faced, Williams opened his own practice and became the first African-American member of the American Institute of Architects in 1923.



Williams' individualistic philosophy evolved throughout his early career; as he wrote in his landmark 1937 essay *I Am a Negro*,

“[As a Negro], I was turned away by would-be employers who, to my certain knowledge, needed help. At first I could not understand, but gradually I came to realize that I was being condemned, not by a lack of ability, but by my color. I passed through successive stages of bewilderment, inarticulate protest, resentment, and, finally, reconciliation to the status of my race. Eventually, however, as I grew older and thought more clearly, I found in my condition an incentive to personal accomplishment, an inspiring challenge. Without having the wish to ‘show them,’ I developed a fierce desire to ‘show myself.’ I wanted to vindicate every ability I had. I wanted to acquire new abilities. I wanted to prove that I, *as an individual*, deserved a place in the world.”

Williams' reputation among elite developers and celebrities steadily grew as he designed modern municipal buildings, stylish private homes, and retail spaces all over the southland. By the 1950s, Williams had earned the nickname “Architect to the Stars,” designing exclusive custom homes for celebrities including Frank Sinatra, Cary Grant, Barbara Stanwyck, Bert Lahr, and the Ball-Arnaz family. Some of his most famous public projects include the current iteration of the Beverly Hills Hotel and the committee-led redesign and modernization of Los Angeles International Airport in 1960.

After fifty successful years in practice, Williams retired in 1973. Since his death in 1980 at the age of 85, he has been honored with the A.I.A. Gold Medal Award, and is the subject of several books and an upcoming documentary.