

# Segregationist Senator's Secret Daughter Dies

## Woman waited decades to reveal her parentage

(AP) -- Essie Mae Washington-Williams, the mixed-race daughter of one-time segregationist Sen. Strom Thurmond who kept her parentage secret for more than 70 years, has died. She was 87.

Vann Dozier of Leevy's Funeral Home in Columbia said Washington-Williams died Sunday. A cause of death was not given.

Washington-Williams was the daughter of Thurmond and his family's black maid. The identity of her famous father was rumored for decades in political circles and the black community. She later said she kept his secret because, "He trusted me, and I respected him."

Not until after Thurmond's death in 2003 at age 100 did Washington-Williams come forward and say her father was the white man who ran for president on a segregationist platform and served in the U.S. Senate for more than 47 years.

"I am Essie Mae Washington-Williams, and at last I am com-



Essie Mae Washington-Williams

pletely free," Washington-Williams said at a news conference revealing her secret.

She was born in 1925 after Thurmond, then 22, had an affair with a 16-year-old black maid who worked in his family's Edgefield, S.C., home. She spent years as a school teacher in Los Angeles, keeping in touch with her famous father.

While Thurmond never publicly acknowledged his daughter, his family acknowledged her claim after she came forward. She later said Thurmond's widow, Nancy, was "a very wonderful person," and called Strom Thurmond Jr. "very caring, and interested in what's going on with me."

Washington-Williams was

raised by Mary and John Washington in Coatesville, Pa. When she was 13, Mary Washington's sister, Carrie Butler, told Essie Mae that she was her mother.

Washington-Williams met Thurmond for the first time a few years later in a law office in Thurmond's hometown of Edgefield.

"He never called my mother by her name. He didn't verbally acknowledge that I was his child," Washington-Williams wrote in her autobiography, "Dear Senator: A Memoir by the Daughter of Strom Thurmond."

"He didn't ask when I was leaving and didn't invite me to come back. It was like an audience with an important man, a job interview, but not a reunion with a father," she said in the book released January 2005.

It was the first of many visits between Washington-Williams and her father.

He supported her, paying for her to attend then-South Carolina State College at the same time Thurmond was governor. He also helped her later after she was widowed in the 1960s.

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## in diversity Print



### Young, Black & Gifted

Recognizing kids on right track

**By Jack Thomas**  
Portland's African-American youth are often caught up in a net of negative public perceptions brought by news of gang violence, the widening achievement gap and school drop-out rates.  
The story of young black kids in Portland who are on the right track, making good grades, headed to college and are making positive contributions to the city. A new photographic exhibit recognizes the hard work of some of these students and shows that there is still reason to be optimistic.  
"Young, Black & Gifted," a photo essay putting the spotlight on the accomplishments of high-achieving African-American students, opens to the public on Monday, April 1 at Portland School District headquarters at 501 N. Duane St. and will later be moved to the Lloyd Center Mall.  
The project is the brain child of Robin Williams, the district's family and community engagement manager, who said she got the idea after having a conversation with someone who worried about what she mentioned an African-American male student was struggling. After the conversation she worried that all the attention on the problems of young black students was overlooking the hard work of others.  
"You hear so much about deficits and achievement gaps," she said.  
Williams said she called together with a call to the community of black students doing well in school and the treatment of a photographer and web developer.  
Michele Hill, a teacher at Jefferson High School is one of the 13 students featured in the exhibit.  
Hill gets A's and B's in school. She does especially well in English classes. Single by name Scripps, one of her favorite teachers, and chemistry is getting straight A's. Hill plans to go to college and is thinking about law school down the road.  
"The recognition is a lot," she said of her high school. "I like



Single Hill (right) is a member of Jefferson High School in north Portland. Her contribution as one of the city's "Young, Black & Gifted" students is part of a new exhibit coming to school district headquarters and Lloyd Center Mall.

The Portland Observer

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