Community Leader Ruth Williams Passes

By Huel Washington

Ruth Williams, a long-time and well-respected community leader, recently passed following a long illness and was interred after a private ceremony, according to her wishes. She was 63.

A graduate of Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Mrs. Williams moved to San Francisco because she was determined to find a better life for her family, which included her husband, George, Sr. and six sons.

She became active in the Bayview Hunters Point District, aligning herself with the community's "Big 5," Elouise Westbrook, Oceola Washington, Julie Commer, Bertha Freeman, and Rosie Lee Williams.

Mrs. Williams served on the San Francisco Human Rights Commission's Employment Committee and was Chairperson of the San Francisco General Outpatient council as well as the Planned Parenthood clinic in sex education, parenting, and drug rehabilitation.

Her work in the community escalated over the years, serving on Joint Housing Committee, Poverty Council, Butchertown Homeowners and Tenants Association, Cities Commission, and established the Family Planning Clinic.

Mrs. Williams' testimony before the United States Senate Appropriations Committee in 1970 led to the release of millions of dollars of Housing and Urban Development funds to Bayview Hunters Point residents.

After her husband's untimely death in 1973 from high blood pressure, Mrs. Williams mounted a campaign to combat the ailment which has caused the death of many African Americans. She organized fund raisers soliciting the assistance of such outstanding artists as musical director and composer, H.B. Barnum, Tina Turner, Larry Graham, the Family Stone, the O'Jays, Danny Cosse, and raised $55,000 for the Bayview Hunters Point District.

The Jackie Robinson Gardens Apartments in Hunters Point, a low-income affordable housing complex, the first built in Hunters Point, was founded by Mrs. Williams.

With her background in performing arts, she established the Bayview Repertory Theater Company and produced 37 plays as a writer and actor.

In her later years, Mrs. Williams formed her own music company, "Thro' Down Industries" and was approved for a $200,000 loan by the Bayview Hunters Point Economic Development Task Force but the agreement has met with opposition in the city's bureaucracy.

Her six sons are Kevin, Keith, George, Jr., Timothy, Eric, and Glen. They say they will continue their mother's vision of establishing a company in the community that will help alleviate the high unemployment rate in the city.