

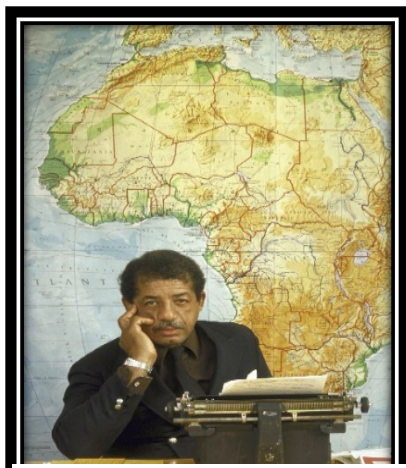
PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

MARTIN KILSON

Educator, Professor, Activist

“It is, indeed, one of the basic moral blind spots of American conservatism that its intellectual and leadership energy have never been focused in a provocative way on America’s racial-caste legacy.”

Page | 1



Courtesy Steve Liss/The LIFE Images Collection, via Getty Images

Background Information

Born: February 14, 1931; Died: April 24, 2019

Kilson graduated from Lincoln University and later studied at Harvard University, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1959. He began as a lecturer at Harvard University and was later promoted to assistant professor at Harvard University in 1962.

Kilson’s Resistance

Kilson was a political science professor who firmly believed in integration. Despite growing during a time when Black Americans did not have access to a high-quality education due to racism and discrimination, he achieved excellent grades. As an undergraduate student, he attended a lecture by W.E.B. Dubois, which shaped his belief in the importance of being excellent and giving back to the Black community. As a political scientist, he focused on power, leadership and race in the Africa continent and in the Black American community.¹ While at Harvard during the 1960s, he led and advised the inaugural class of the Harvard-Radcliffe Afro-American Students Association. From this position, Kilson worked effortlessly to further the development of African American studies as both a discipline and department at Harvard.²

Achievements

By 1969, Kilson became the first tenured African American professor at Harvard University. During his career, he received a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, was named the Frank G. Thompson Professor of Government, delivered Harvard’s W.E.B. DuBois Lectures, and received an American Book Award³ for his book, *The Transformation of the African American Intelligentsia, 1880-2012. Political Scientist*. His legacy of intellectual excellence continues and commitment to uplifting Black undergraduate students continue to this day.

¹ Martin Kilson, College’s first tenured African American professor, dies at 88. (2019). *The Harvard Gazette*. Retrieved from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/05/martin-kilson-harvard-colleges-first-african-american-to-be-named-full-professor-dies-at-88/>

² Professor Emeritus Martin Kilson passed away yesterday. (25 April 2019). *Department of Government*. Retrieved from <https://gov.harvard.edu/news/professor-emeritus-martin-kilson-died-yesterday>

³ Martin Kilson. (2019).

Essential Questions

1. Kilson excelled academically despite the barriers he faced as a Black man in America and believed it was important to support Black Americans in the process. Name three things he did that supported Black Americans to be successful.
2. He resisted low expectations many people had for Black Americans by becoming a tenured professor at one of the best universities in the world. Are there any expectations you can resist to reach your goals?
3. **“It is, indeed, one of the basic moral blind spots of American conservatism that its intellectual and leadership energy have never been focused in a provocative way on America’s racial-caste legacy.”**
 - a. What do you think he means by this statement?
 - b. Does it still apply today?

