# Williams, Bert (1874-1922) Encyclopedia Article

## Williams, Bert (1874-1922)

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# Williams, Bert (1874-1922)

Known during his lifetime as "the funniest man in America," Egbert Austin "Bert" Williams enjoyed fame as the straight man and ballad singer of the African American comedy team of Williams and Walker. Williams met his partner, George Walker, in San Francisco in 1893, when he began performing in order to finance his studies at Stanford University. They worked their way to New York, where in 1896 they appeared in Victor Herbert's *Gold Bug.* The two performed in such musical comedy hits as *The Sons of Ham* (1900), *In Dahomey* (1902), *Abyssinia* (1905), and *Bandanna Land* (1907). When Walker retired, Williams starred in *Mr. Lode of Koal* (1909) then performed with Florenz Ziegfeld's *Follies* from 1910 to 1919. In 1920 Williams joined Eddie Cantor in *Broadway Brevities.* Williams was admired for impeccable comedic timing and pantomimes. He died in 1922 after opening in *Under the Bamboo Tree.*

## Further Reading:

Charters, Ann. *Nobody: The Story of Bert Williams.* New York, Macmillan, 1970.

Riis, Thomas L. *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915.* Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.

Smith, Eric Lidell. *Bert Williams: A Biography of the Pioneer Black*

*Comedian.* Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland, 1992.