

MOTION

Willis O. Tyler was born on July 19, 1880 in Bloomington, Illinois and passed away in June 1949, here in his adopted City of Los Angeles. Having lost both of his parents as a child, he was raised by an aunt, who had been a leader in the Bloomington station of the Underground Railroad.

At the age of 16, Tyler enrolled in Indiana University where he studied for two years. In 1898 he enlisted in the Indiana Colored Volunteer Infantry to fight for Cuba's independence in the Spanish American war. He served as a corporal and in the capacity of company clerk.

Around 1900, he returned to Indiana University where he became president of the orator's club. In 1901, he claimed the high honor of winning the annual oratorical contest of Indiana colleges. He was the only Black contestant and first Black person in state history to win the contest.

Tyler went on to graduate from Harvard Law School in 1907 or 1908, where he received the highest honors ever given to a Black student. He moved to Los Angeles and became active in the Civil Rights movement and worked closely with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Tyler litigated many landmark civil rights cases. Most notably was Tyler's success in the Title Guaranty v. Garrott case in 1919. H.L Garrott, an African American police officer, purchased a home for his family in South Los Angeles. A deed recorded against the property prohibited the property's being sold to any person of "African, Chinese or Japanese descent." When the title company discovered that Garrott owned the property, it sued to force him to relinquish title to his property without compensation.

Tyler represented Officer Garrott and argued that the racially restrictive covenant violated the due process clause of the 14th amendment of the US Constitution and that the restrictive covenant must be ruled invalid because it conflicted with the individual right of a seller to transfer one's property as he or she sees fit. California's Court of Appeals agreed with Tyler, and this decision helped pave the way for the U.S. Supreme Court's Shelley v. Kramer decision, outlawing racially restrictive covenants, two decades later.

Tyler also represented Willa and Charles Bruce, the founders of Bruce's Beach, in their effort to stop the City of Manhattan Beach's racially motivated eminent domain of the Bruce's Beach property.

In 1921, Tyler became one of the founding members of the Sigma Pi Phi fraternity in Los Angeles, the oldest continuously existing Greek-letter post-graduate fraternity originally founded by, and primarily for, eminent Black professional men.

Tyler's law office was located at 224 South Spring Street in downtown Los Angeles.

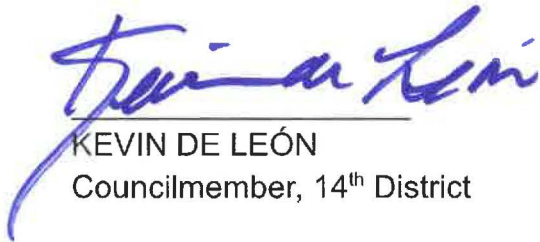
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Council District 14 would like to recognize, commend and honor Willis O. Tyler for his service to his community, this City and our country towards the advancement of racial justice by dedicating the intersection at Spring and Second Street in his honor.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the intersection at Spring and Second Streets in downtown Los Angeles be named as "Willis O. Tyler Square" and that the Department of Transportation be directed to erect permanent ceremonial signage to this effect at this location.

PRESENTED BY:



KEVIN DE LEÓN
Councilmember, 14th District

SECONDED BY:



ORIGINAL