



# Soapy: A Biography of G. Mennen Williams

*Thomas J. Noer*

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"This is an important book about an important public official, G. Mennen 'Soapy' Williams---an unabashed liberal, a true humanitarian, and a great patriot."

---George McGovern

"Soapy Williams had a deep talent not only to compel but on occasion to repel."

---John Kenneth Galbraith

"Thomas Noer has written a model biography of a fascinating political figure. He brings Williams to life with all his contradictions, old-fashioned qualities, and admirable idealism."

---Robert Divine, George W. Littlefield Professor Emeritus in American History, University of Texas

"G. Mennen 'Soapy' Williams was not only a giant in the 20th century history of the Michigan Democratic Party, the history of the state of Michigan and our nation-he was a giant ahead of his time. Throughout his long and extremely distinguished career as Governor of Michigan, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Soapy maintained an unwavering commitment to equality, justice and civil rights for all people."

---Senator Carl Levin

In this first complete biography of G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams, author Thomas Noer brings to life the story of one of the most controversial and colorful politicians in twentieth-century American politics and a giant in the Michigan Democratic Party.

In 1948, winning a stunning upset, Williams became Michigan's second Democratic governor since the Civil War and was reelected five times. He served under Kennedy and Johnson as Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, briefly held the post of U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, and was a member of the Michigan Supreme Court from 1970 to 1986, serving as Chief Justice in his last term.

Sporting his instantly recognizable trademark green and white polka-dot bow tie, Williams was a flamboyant character. He was also known for his energetic campaign style: he could say "hello" in seventeen languages, would shake hands with as many as five thousand factory workers a day, and made seemingly endless diplomatic trips to Africa. All of this captured the attention of the media and the public and made Williams into a celebrity.

Beneath his showy public persona, however, Williams also made important contributions to American diplomatic and political history. He built an unrivaled political machine in Michigan, bringing organized labor, African Americans, and ethnic groups into a new coalition; influenced the shift in American policy toward support for African independence; and wrote landmark decisions as a jurist on the Michigan Supreme Court.

The fascinating story of a complex and complicated man, *Soapy* will introduce one of the great American political figures of the twentieth century to a new generation of readers.

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