

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally

PERSON

Dymally, Mervyn M., 1926-2012

Alternative Names: The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally;

Life Dates: May 12, 1926-October 7, 2012

Place of Birth: Bonasse, Trinidad & Tobago

Residence: Los Angeles, CA

Work: Los Angeles, CA

Occupations: State Assemblyman

Biographical Note

California State Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally was born in Cedros, Trinidad on May 12, 1926 to a mother and father from Trinidad and India, respectively. While in Trinidad, Dymally was a staff reporter for The Vanguard, a newspaper published by the Oil Workers Trade Union. In 1946, he traveled to the United States and attended Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri to study journalism.

After leaving Lincoln University, Dymally traveled to California, where he resumed his education by earning a B.A. degree in education in 1954 from Los Angeles State College. After teaching in the Los Angeles Unified School District for a number of years, Dymally became a field coordinator in 1960 for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign. Two years later, he was elected to the California General Assembly, and in 1966, he became the first African American to serve in the California State Senate. As a State Senator, Dymally chaired a number of committees, including social welfare and veterans affairs committees. He also earned a master's degree in government from California State University in 1969. In 1974, he again made history, when he was elected the first black lieutenant governor in California history. Though he failed to be reelected in 1978, Dymally went on to earn a Ph.D. from the United States International University in San Diego, and in 1980, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives, becoming the first foreign-born African American to serve in the U.S. Congress.

As a Congressman, Dymally served on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where he

was the chair of the Subcommittee on International Operations. He also served on the Post Office and Civil Service Committee, as well as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus from 1986 to 1987. In 1991, Dymally was appointed by President Bill Clinton to serve as a representative to the United Nations, and he retired from Congress in 1992.

Since then, Dymally has remained active, having been named honorary consul to the Republic of Benin in 1993, as well as serving as a distinguished professor at Central State University in Ohio and as a member of the faculty at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles. In 2003, Dymally was reelected to the California State Assembly, and in 2004, he became the chief assembly protocol officer.

Dymally was vice-president of the Pacific Century Institute, a non-profit organization that fosters education and policy dialogue for nations of the Pacific Rim. He and his wife, Alice, have two children and three grandchildren.

Mervyn Dymally passed away on October 7, 2012.

Related Entries

Lincoln University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Reaver School of Chiropractic [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Chapman University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Los Angeles City College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Cedros Government Primary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

California State Assembly [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Representative

California Lieutenant Governor [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1975 to 1979]

California Lieutenant Governor

U.S. House of Representative [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1981 to 1993]

Representative

