

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dymally, Mervyn M., 1926-2012
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally,
Dates:	November 15, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:46:29).
Abstract:	State assemblyman The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally (1926 - 2012) has served as a state senator for California, lieutenant governor of California and as a member of the U.S. Congress, where he chaired the Congressional Black Caucus. Dymally was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 15, 2004, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_233
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 15, 2004, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. State assemblyman The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally (1926 - 2012) has served as a state senator for California, lieutenant governor of California and as a member of the U.S. Congress, where he chaired the Congressional Black Caucus.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Dymally, Mervyn M., 1926-2012

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Dymally, Mervyn M., 1926-2012--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

California

Occupations:

State Assemblyman

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, November 15, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, Section A2004_233_001_001, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally was born on May 12, 1926 in Bonasse, Trinidad and Tobago to Andreide Richardson Dymally and Hamid Dymally. His maternal grandfather moved from Venezuela to Bonasse, worked as a fisherman, and married a Caribbean woman of African descent who spoke French Patois. Dymally's mother cooked for oil workers from Grenada. Dymally's paternal grandfather came from India to Trinidad as an indentured laborer for the island's coconut and sugar estates. Dymally's father attended Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain, then taught at the local school in Bonasse where he met Dymally's mother. He later worked as a merchant with his father. To appease both his Catholic maternal family and Muslim paternal family, Dymally was baptized Anglican. Although his family had little money, food was plentiful on the island. He grew up in an integrated neighborhood where various ethnic communities shared their cultural traditions. He remembers playing soccer and cricket in the street, and eating roti.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, Section A2004_233_001_002, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally received an English education while growing up in the British West Indies. Dymally first attended Cedros Government School, then an English school in Trinidad. After failing the Cambridge Senior Examination, he spent time drinking, attending calypso dances and heckling British politician Lord David Pitt. While collecting revenue for the Oil Workers Union, he began reading African American newspapers like the Chicago Defender. This sparked his interest in journalism, and Dymally began writing for the union newspaper The Vanguard. He was accepted to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri, where he studied under journalism department head Armistead Pride and Professor Consuelo Young. Dymally first encountered segregation when he arrived in the U.S. in 1946, although his status as a foreigner allowed him to enter white-only establishments. He moved to New York City before entering Reaver School of Chiropractic in Dayton, Ohio. Dymally remembers food from his childhood.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, Section A2004_233_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally enrolled in Chapman College in Orange, California to maintain his student visa while working part-time. He transferred to Los Angeles City College, and then to Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Science. Upon graduation, Dymally substitute taught during the day and worked at night. Exhausted, he quit and joined the Young Democrats of California and served as their treasurer. He was appointed to the California Disaster Office by Governor Pat Brown in 1961. While working with California Assemblyman HistoryMaker Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, Dymally decided to run for the California State Assembly. He won the election with the help of his campaign manager, Bill Greene, and the youth vote. Driving for Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also brought Dymally visibility. During his time in the assembly, Dymally passed legislation mandating the teaching of African American history and worked to address police brutality. Dymally recalls the mentorship of author Lorenzo Greene.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, Section
A2004_233_001_004, TRT: 0:28:22 ?

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally worked under Jesse M. Unruh in the California State Assembly for two terms and created a program for African Americans and Latinos to receive public affairs training. In 1966, he was elected to the California State Senate, where he passed the Dymally adoption bill, chaired the Democratic Caucus and the Reapportionment Committee, and supported younger members' efforts to reform the senate. In 1971, he passed the Dymally-Alatore Bilingual Services Act with Richard Alatore. Dymally successfully ran for lieutenant governor of California in 1974, when Jerry Brown was elected governor. In 1976, Dymally served as acting governor, and prevented the extradition of a man accused of stealing candy to Georgia. Dymally lost his reelection campaign because of rumors that the FBI would indict him. In 1980, Dymally was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. As a representative, he helped the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem fight deportation to the U.S. and remain in Israel.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, Section
A2004_233_001_005, TRT: 0:31:21 ?

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, with Dr. Kenneth Clark and Christopher Edley, Sr., founded the Joint Center for Political Studies in D.C. during his time in the California State Senate. Dymally chaired the Congressional Black Caucus while serving in the U.S. House of Representatives. As chairman of the African Subcommittee, he took up the work of his friend and predecessor Congressman Charles Diggs by traveling to forty-two African countries. He met several important leaders, including Democratic Republic of the Congo President Mobutu Sese Seko, Indian Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, Libyan Prime Minister Muammar Gaddafi, and Palestinian Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat. After retiring in 1992, Dymally visited Trinidad and joined the United National Congress. In 2002, Dymally returned to the California State Assembly and fought to save the Martin Luther King, Jr./Drew Medical Center. Dymally reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community and his life.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally, Section
A2004_233_001_006, TRT: 0:17:30 ?

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally worked with the United National Congress in Trinidad, but he left the party after witnessing its corruption. Dymally was appointed honorary consul for Benin and honored at a ceremony in Wida, Benin along with Africare co-founder HistoryMaker C. Payne Lucas. He also talks about his experience with racism in the United States and his frustration with increasing partisanship in the government. Dymally reflects upon his legacy and his political career. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.