



THE MEASURE AND MODEL OF MERVYN DYMALLY: A LIFE WELL-LIVED

Los Angeles Sentinel, 10-25-12, p.A-6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

There is always a great sense of loss at the passing of a generational giant, a tall-standing and steadfast leader whose long shadow offered us protective shade and whose lengthy strides and enormous efforts hurried us toward victory in our ongoing struggle for good in the world. And so it is with the ever honored and Honorable Dr. Mervyn Malcolm Dymally. But there is also a pressing and proper need, as our sacred texts teach us, to celebrate his well-lived life, learn and live its lessons and extend the love we have for him to our people who produced and made him possible. For it is this love and service given to our people in a sustained, dedicated and decisive manner that made us honor and support him in life, mourn his recent passing and raise him up as a measure and model of what we and our leaders should be about in this fundamental time of turning and continued struggle.

Let us, then, raise and praise his name in loving memory and rightful homage in the *Izibongo* tradition of the ancestors. *Bayete*, (homage to you) Mervyn Dymally: elder statesman, committed servant of the people, master politician, mentor of the multicultural many for numerous generations; tireless advocate for the excluded, marginalized and vulnerable; way-opener for the up-and-coming, the seekers of opportunities to succeed and excel; and for the shutout, locked up and pressed down; and thus, a self-conscious contributor to building the just and good society and world we all want and deserve to live and flourish in.

His is a story that demands and deserves to be told, a narrative that needs no added adornment, a record that reads best when it's offered in its original and awesome form. Trinidad African man, he came to America, seeking opportunity in a society not yet ready

for him and African people as a whole. It had to be reshaped, through hard and relentless struggle, into a more democratic, inclusive and people-responsive form. He realized Black people were already in the midst of a world-changing Freedom Struggle and he assumed a central role in it in the areas of his interest and expertise.

Thus, he chose politics as his battleground and service to the people as his fundamental mission. He engaged and introduced legislation on the major and continuing issues of our time: education, employment, health care, HIV/AIDS, housing, and medical services for the needy. His commitment to education and medical service culminate in his work for King/Drew Hospital and Charles Drew University and its nursing school bears his name in memory and honor of him.

To speak of Merv Dymally, then, is to speak of history, struggle, way-opening and impressive achievement. Surely, we are greatly impoverished by his passing, but enduringly enriched by the awesome legacy he has left us. It is a legacy of service, leadership, lifting as he climbed, and achieving against all kinds of obstacles and opposition. His life work as a public servant and servant of the people is wide ranging, including teacher, professor, educator, institution-builder, assemblyman, state senator, lieutenant governor, Congressman, and fearless advocate for African peoples everywhere in matters of rights, resources, and racial and social justice—here, in Africa, in the Caribbean, and throughout the world African community, from Harlem and Haiti to Harare. Merv also was a strong and audacious advocate for human rights, self-determination and liberation for all oppressed and struggling peoples of the world, including the people of Haiti, Palestine and Cuba, who had few open advocates.

THE MEASURE AND MODEL OF MERVYN DYMALLY:

A LIFE WELL-LIVED

Los Angeles Sentinel, 10-25-12, p.A-6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

And he was a constant advocate for people of color here, working with our organization Us and others to build strong and mutually beneficial Black/Brown and other Third World relations before it became popular or was thought to be useful or necessary. A skilled political leader, Merv built organizational structures that not only won elections, but aided and mentored generations of others, created alliances and coalitions of common ground and pointed the way toward real partnerships in diversity and equality for common good.

Thus, Merv built coalitions, alliances and working relations with Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Whites, on common ground, supporting candidates, and issues of mutual interests. Also, he supported particular interests of allies which had justice implications for all—reparations for the Japanese, payment and citizenship for Filipino veterans, sovereignty for Native Americans, and unionization for farm workers—Latinos, Filipinos and others.

However, he never diminished or compromised his identity and duty to the Black community. Indeed, the alliances were always to practice our values and increase our power and possibilities in struggle, not to lose ourselves in an identityless structure or process. For he knew we are our own liberators and a people that cannot save itself is lost forever, and that in this regard, there is no substitute for the presence and power of an aware, engaged and organized people, constantly involved in a multiplicity of actions which define, defend and promote their interests.

Although, I will always admire and honor him for all his impressive personal and social achievements, I value equally our friendship and work together since the 60's; our intellectual exchanges and earning our first doctorates together at the same university, USIU; and our numerous conversations on critical issues of leadership, struggle, history and things to come. And I am especially and forever grateful to him for *standing up to advocate and secure my freedom from political imprisonment* when other politicians we had worked with and supported were silent or cautioned us to wait for more favorable and convenient times. He had intervened in similar ways for others on various issues. It was what we called *having heart*, that is to say, *uncompromising courage and commitment in both a moral and manhood sense*.

As we go forth in the work of reconceiving and remaking the world, the work to which Mervyn Dymally dedicated and disciplined his life, let us honor his legacy of service and struggle by teaching it, sharing the narrative, values and vision with others and ultimately by living it ourselves. And we must honor this measure and model of manhood, not only in politics and leadership, but also in the way we live our daily lives with *dignity, integrity, insightfulness, audacity* and *righteous* and *relentless* struggle for good in the world. For, as the *Husia*, the sacred text of our ancestors says, this along with his work will insure that he is self-consciously "counted and honored among the ancestors; his name shall endure as a monument and what he has done on earth shall never perish or pass away." Hotep. Ase. Heri

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, www.MaulanaKarenga.org.