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ENG 212

Ernest "Dutch" Morial: For Louisiana By Louisiana

“Ernest "Dutch" Morial was a lawyer and politician who was active during the Civil Rights Movement in New Orleans beginning in the 1960s.” (Brinks) “Morial’s political career was beset with many first for African Americans, such as being the first African American since Reconstruction to be elected to the Louisiana State Legislature and the first African American to serve on the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.” (Pegg, 99) Morial was also the first African American mayor of Louisiana’s capital city, New Orleans.

 Ernest Nathan Morial is the youngest of the six children parented by Leonie V. and Walter Etienne Morial. He was born October 9, 1929, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Morial earned his BS in Business Administration from Xavier University in 1951. In 1954, Morial graduate from Louisiana State University Law School and was noted as the first African American to do so.

 Morial’s professional career began when he served in the U.S. Army Intelligence Corp during the the United States’ conflict with North Korean, from 1954-1956. During that time Morial found his soulmate, Sybil G. Haydel and they got married in 1955. They went on to have five children, Julie, Marc, Jacques, Cheri, and Monique. Once his obligation to the military was complete in 1956, Morial returned to New Orleans where he had a law partnership and served as general counsel to the Standard Life Insurance Company from 1960 to 1967. Before beginning a career in electoral politics, Morial was appointed assistant U.S. attorney for New Orleans from 1965 to 1967.

 “Morial's mentor was A.P. Tureaud, a leading civil rights attorney and key figure in black New Orleans since the 1930s. As president of the New Orleans Chapter of the NAACP from 1962 to 1965, Morial was at the forefront of black protest and the dismantling of Jim Crow.” (Amistad Research Center). In 1966, Morial began serving on the national level as an attorney with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. During this time, Morial participated in the Dryades Street Boycott and advocated for the desegregation of buses and streetcars. He also fought for the integration of Louisiana State University of New Orleans.

In 1967, Morial became the first African American to be elected to the Louisiana State Legislature as Representative for District 80. He also later became the first assistant African American U.S. attorney in New Orleans, the first African American to serve as juvenile court judge, and the first African American on the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

 “In 1977, Morial announced his candidacy for Mayor of the city of New Orleans, suing the State Judicial Commission for the right to campaign while remaining a judge. Ultimately, Morial won the general election over Joseph DiRosa by over six thousand votes, becoming the first African American mayor of New Orleans. He gained national attention in his first term as mayor for standing up to police and sanitation workers - leading to a city-wide strike resulting in the cancellation of Mardi Gras in 1979.” (Amistad Research Center)

 In 1982, Morial was reelected Mayor of New Orleans, after defeating Ron Faucheux. Two years later, Morial was elected President of the United States Council of Mayors. Ernest Nathan Morial died suddenly and unexpectedly on December 24, 1989, of a cardiac arrest.

Earnest “Dutch" Morial help shape the legal system of Louisiana by pushing the standards and set the bar for African Americans. His legacy as political mastermind and civil rights activist still lives through all that he accomplished in Louisiana. The great state of Louisiana was enhanced by Morial and has continues to grow after his passing.

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