

Abdoulaye Ly Biography

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Abdoulaye Ly

Abdoulaye Ly (born 1919) was an African historian and Senegalese political leader. He was a key leader of the post-World War II African student generation and among the first to demand independence from France as a legitimate political goal.

Abdoulaye Ly was born in Saint-Louis, Republic of Senegal. He received his higher education in Paris, where he was awarded a doctorate in history and was president of the African Students' Association. Upon his return to Senegal in the middle 1950s, he was appointed head of the historical museum at Gorée and assistant director of the French Institute of Black Africa (Institute Française d'Afrique Noire).

Striving for Independence

A man of great principle and courage, Ly did not hesitate to enter into a minority opposition, even at great peril to his own career, when he thought conditions so warranted. At a time when almost all the established African leaders wanted to continue their membership within the colonial establishment, Ly, as leader of the returning students and technicians, demanded that all of the countries of West Africa leave the French orbit. At a time when France was conducting a war against the Algerians, the idea of seeking increased African representation in the French National Assembly was particularly abhorrent to him.

Political Career

At the same time, Ly and his followers felt that to be effective they could not afford to be isolated. Hence, they decided that their best opportunities lay in bringing about reforms within the governing party rather than remaining on the outside. In 1956 the "young intellectuals" were welcomed into Léopold Senghor's party in power, and Ly was made a minister and party secretary. By September 1958, however, Ly left the government to form a new opposition party over the issue of accepting France's offer of complete and immediate independence, an offer that could also have meant the end of all economic aid. Finally, in 1966, confronted with new issues and trying to raise the standard of living of all the people, Ly brought his followers back into the government, accepting another ministry in order to help in the task of national reconstruction.

According to the Senegalese Embassy in Washington, DC, Ly has been living a quiet life in Saint-Louis for the past several years.