

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Hazel O'Leary

PERSON

O'Leary, Hazel Rollins, 1937-

**Alternative Names:** The Honorable Hazel O'Leary; Hazel Reid

**Life Dates:** May 17, 1937-

**Place of Birth:** Newport News, Virginia, USA

**Residence:** Hilton Head, SC

**Occupations:** Cabinet Appointee; University President

## Biographical Note

Cabinet appointee and president of Fisk University, Hazel Rollins O'Leary was born Hazel Reid on May 17, 1937, in Newport News, Virginia to Dr. Russell Edward Reid and Hazel Palleman. Raised by her stepmother Mattie Ross Reid, O'Leary attended the Urban League's camp in Atwater, Massachusetts every summer where she met Alma Brown and the Delany sisters. O'Leary attended Aberdeen Gardens School in Hampton, Virginia, Booker T. Washington School, John Marshall School and Huntington High School in Newport News, Virginia. O'Leary graduated from the High School of Fine and Performing Arts in Newark, New Jersey in 1955. She then graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Fisk University in 1959, at the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement. Among her teachers were Vivian Henderson, Robert Hayden, and T.S. Courier. O'Leary went on to obtain her J.D. degree from Rutgers University Law School in 1966.

From 1967 to 1969, O'Leary handled organized crime cases while serving as assistant county prosecutor in Essex County, New Jersey. Later, she joined the accounting firm of Coopers & Lybrand. During the administration of President Jimmy Carter, O'Leary acted as assistant administrator of the Federal Energy Commission, general counsel of the Community Services Administration, and an administrator for the Economic Regulatory Commission of the newly-created Department of Energy. In 1981, O'Leary and her husband formed O'Leary and Associates, 1989 to 1993, where she served as executive vice president of Northern States Power in Minnesota.

Nominated by President Bill Clinton in 1993, O'Leary became the seventh United States Secretary of Energy and the first African American woman to serve in that office. As Secretary, O'Leary changed the department's Office of Classification to the Office of Declassification, initiated an aggressive clean-up of surplus plutonium, created an Openness Advisory Panel, and encouraged the Clinton administration to end

nuclear testing in the United States. O'Leary established the Samuel P. Massie Chair of Excellence Professorship in Environmental Disciplines which benefited nine historically black colleges and universities. In 1996, O'Leary resigned and joined Blaylock and Partners, becoming CEO in 2002. In 2004, O'Leary was named President of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

O'Leary served on the boards of Africare, UAL Inc. (parent company of United Airlines), Morehouse College; Alchemix Corporation; AES Corporation; The Center for Democracy; ICF Kaiser; Scottish Re, Ltd.; Nashville Chamber Orchestra; the World Wildlife Fund; Nashville Alliance for Public Education; ITC Holdings, Inc.; and Nashville Business Community for the Arts. O'Leary also received numerous honors for her work. O'Leary was widowed in 1987 and she also has one son, attorney Carl G. Rollins III.

Hazel O'Leary was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 15, 2007.

## Related Entries

**Aberdeen Gardens School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**John Marshall School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Booker T. Washington Middle School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Arts High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Fisk University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**Rutgers University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**J.D.**

**Huntington High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Coopers & Lybrand** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Partner**

**Jimmy Carter administration** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**State of New Jersey** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1967 to 1969]

**Assistant County Prosecutor**

**O'Leary and Associates** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1981 to ?]

**Northern States Power** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1989 to 1993]

**Executive Vice President**

**Federal government of the United States** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1993 to 1996]

**Blaylock and Partners** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1996 to 2004]

**CEO**

**Fisk University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2004 to ?]

**President**

**Morehouse College** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Africare** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**United Airlines** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**The Center for Democracy** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Alchemix Corporation** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**