

2020 Distinguished Alumnus
The Honorable Eric C. Taylor '80



Born in Sacramento, Calif., you grew up in Los Angeles. Your mother, Joan, of Portsmouth, Ohio, was a longtime bookkeeper with Consolidated Hotels of California – Los Angeles. She went on to become Consolidated's general manager, who managed over 700 rental units in her 35-year career. Your mom played an integral part in you applying to Cate School in early 1977. Your father, John, of Houston, Texas, moved to the Bay Area with his parents in 1941. It was there that he became a lifelong activist for racial equality and one of the Freedom Riders in the South in 1961. His mother (your grandmother) Ella Mae Ferneil, was the first African American registered nurse in California. As a young student at Audubon Junior High School in Los Angeles, you became a scholar with *A Better Chance*. In April of 1977, you were accepted to Cate School.

You arrived on the Mesa as a 10th grader. Though described as "quiet" and "reserved" in your application and references, you quickly became an active member of the Cate community. In the spirit of *Servons*, you were a consistent volunteer at St. Vincent's as well as the Camarillo Hospital

service project. You joined the Chorale during your first fall and impressed longtime music teacher, Frank Ellis. Frank wrote, "Eric emerged as a real surprise talent! He just joined the Chorale, and I am very glad because he has some real vocal potential." That musical talent was quickly evident as a member of the small singing group, *Chromatics*. Alongside faculty member David Hostage and classmates Steve Giusto '80, Mike Jones '80, Chris Maloney '80, and others, you performed in concerts in the McIntosh Room, in Santa Barbara, and at various alumni gatherings. You never forgot the words, as evidenced by many alumni renditions of *High Up on the Mesa* at reunions and alumni receptions. Your natural leadership and personal skills earned you positions of Social Committee Head, Junior Prefect in Lido Dormitory as an 11th grader, and Senior Prefect in Long House as a 12th grader. Your senior year advisor, Linette Couturier remarked, "Eric is an excellent person in the dormitory where his willingness to connect with other students and his leadership impressed his dorm parents." You returned from a lengthy hospitalization for a debilitating illness your senior year, to help the varsity basketball team, coached by Frank Griffin, to a 13-5 record playing alongside classmates Steven Fulstone '80, Steve Giusto '80, and Paris Fruscione '80. In addition to your hard work on the court, you left Cate by giving a memorable performance in Hitchcock Theatre as the professor in *South Pacific*.

Upon graduating, you enrolled at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., in the fall of 1980. You studied Spanish Literature and Mathematics and were named an Edwin Gould Scholar. Your Dartmouth studies included terms at the Universities of Granada and Salamanca, Spain, and service as a foreign language teaching assistant in Puebla, Mexico. During your four years at Dartmouth, you were a member of the close harmony group, *The Dartmouth Aires*. You were named to the Tucker Honor Society in 1984 and have since returned to serve on the Dartmouth Alumni Council as Chair of the Enrollment and Admissions Committees and a member of the Trustee Nominations Committee. After serving as a Spanish translator during the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, you attended the University of Virginia Law School, where you earned a Juris Doctorate Degree in May of 1988. While at the University of Virginia, you served as Co-Chair of the Legal Aid Society, Chair of the Migrant Farm Workers Project and on the Executive Committee for the Black Law Students Association (BLSA).

After working as an associate with the law firms of Pettit and Martin, and then Sonnenschein, Nath and Rosenthal, you became a Deputy Los Angeles County Counsel, and served as a litigator and advisor to the Sheriff's Department and the Department of Public Works. Governor Pete Wilson appointed you to the Inglewood Municipal Court in 1998, where you served as presiding judge. You were elevated to the Los Angeles Superior Court in 2000. In 2003, you became the District Supervising Judge of the Southwest District, which encompassed the Inglewood, Torrance, and Redondo Beach Courthouses. You left that position in 2004 when you were elected president of the California Judges Association, a professional group that represents California's 2,230 active and retired state justices, judges, and commissioners. After your term, you were elected to the L.A. Court's Executive Committee. In 2016, you became the first elected to serve a second term as President of the California Judges Association. You have served as a liaison to the Association's Compensation and Benefits Oversight Committee, Discipline Committee, and chair of the Public Information and Education Committee. You served on the statewide Judicial Council from 2004-05 and on its Access and Fairness Committee from 2000-03. In 2018, you were elected Assistant Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Superior Court. In 2019, the Chief Justice also appointed you to serve as a member of the Judicial Council of California. You were named the Langston Bar Association's Justice of the Year in 2004 and received the McFadden Award for Legal Excellence in 2019.

On September 10, 2020, the judiciary of Los Angeles County elected you to serve as Presiding Judge of the Los Angeles Superior Court for a two-year term beginning January 1, 2021. In doing so, the judiciary elevated you from your role as the Assistant Presiding Judge to the court's first African American administrative team, to become the court's second black presiding judge.

Through all of your personal success, you have maintained a reputation of being ethical and thoughtful. Longtime Cate Trustee and former parent Kate Firestone writes, "Eric came to the Cate Board with a broad range of experiences through which he contributes an open-minded and thoughtful perspective. He has been a pillar of integrity on the Board for nearly 15 years, not to mention a pleasure to serve with." In addition to the commitment to your career, you have always supported your *alma mater*. You were appointed to the Cate School Board of Trustees in 2005. You have assisted and chaired many board committees over the years and currently serve as Vice President. You have supported the School's Cate Fund for 28 consecutive years and are a member of *The Cate Legacy Society* – committing your support of the institution in perpetuity. Alongside fellow trustees, you dedicated endless time, effort, and resources into the planning and execution of the *Centennial Campaign*. Now, you have devoted your leadership to the *For Cate and Forever Campaign* of 2020-2024. A regular attendee at Camp Cate with the Class of 1980, Los Angeles and Orange County Receptions, you have traveled as far as Hong Kong for Cate's Asia Summit in 2016. You gave the School's Baccalaureate address in the Katharine Thayer Cate Memorial Chapel in May of 2008 and spoke as part of the *Convocation Series* in Hitchcock Theatre in 2013. Beyond these engagements, it is the personal connection that you have made with alumni and students that has made the greatest impact. You have mentored dozens of Cate students regarding college, law school, and career networking.

For your distinguished career in public service; dedication, commitment, and service to Cate School; and impeccable reputation both professionally and personally, we are honored to award you, The Honorable Eric C. Taylor, Class of 1980, with Cate's Distinguished Alumnus Award for 2020.