

Lucile H. Bluford

Journalist
1911-2003

by Mary Beveridge

Lucile Bluford has been called the “Matriarch” and the “Conscience” of Kansas City. Miss Bluford, as she was always known, was a pioneer, a crusader for equal rights for African Americans and women, but above all she was a journalist, dedicated to getting the news out.

Lucile Harris Bluford was born July 1, 1911, in Salisbury, North Carolina. Her father, John Henry Bluford, was an educator, and the family moved to Kansas City in 1921 where he taught science at Lincoln High School for 30 years. At Lincoln High School she discovered her life’s vocation working on the school newspaper and the yearbook as well as at the *Kansas City Call* after school. She graduated from Lincoln in 1928 as class valedictorian and enrolled in the University of Kansas School of Journalism, graduating with honors in 1932. After working for a summer for *The Daily World* in Atlanta, Georgia, she returned to the city she loved to take a position as a reporter for the *Kansas City American*. She soon moved to its rival paper, *The Call*, at the invitation of Chester A. Franklin. She stayed at *The Call* for the rest of her career, advancing from cub reporter to city editor, then to managing editor and finally editor, owner, and publisher.

In 1939 Miss Bluford applied to the University of Missouri to do graduate work in journalism. She was denied admission because of her race. Displaying the fighting spirit that was to characterize her whole life, she filed suit against the University in a case that ultimately went to the Missouri Supreme Court. Although she lost her case, it resulted in the establishment of a School of Journalism at Lincoln University under the “separate but equal” doctrine. She finally received a degree from the University of Missouri in 1989 in the form of an honorary doctorate.

In her career of 69 years with *The Call*, Lucile Bluford made the weekly newspaper a potent force for fighting discrimination and advancing the cause of African Americans in Kansas City. Never shy, she once scolded the Rev. Jesse Jackson in front of 8,000 people in Municipal Auditorium. She served on the national board



of the NAACP and was active in numerous civic and community organizations. She was honored by a host of institutions, culminating in being named Kansas Citian of the Year in 2002. Kansas City Public Library dedicated its Lucile H. Bluford Branch after her in 1988.

Lucile Bluford died June 13, 2003.

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