

## LUCILE BLUFORD

Lucile Bluford's determination to expose racism, and her clear and forceful journalistic writing, helped change the way African Americans were treated, especially in the area of higher education.



Lucile Bluford

Lucile Harris Bluford grew up in America at a time when schools throughout the South and bordering states like Missouri had a "separate but equal" rule in education. Children of different races could not go to school together. Black students attended schools that were supposed

to be equal in quality to the white schools, but most did not have the same resources.

Bluford discovered while working on the high school newspaper and yearbook that she wanted to become a journalist, but her choices for college were limited. She couldn't attend the University of Missouri in Columbia, which had the oldest and most respected journalism school in the country. It wouldn't admit African Americans. Black students were supposed to study at the historically black college, Lincoln University, in Jefferson City, but it did not have a journalism program. So Bluford attended the University of Kansas.

Bluford began her journalism career in Atlanta, Ga., where she was a reporter for the *Daily World*, an African American newspaper. Returning home, she worked at the *Kansas City American* and then at the *Kansas City Call*, both African American-owned newspapers. At the *Call*, Bluford advanced from reporter to city editor, managing editor, and finally to editor and publisher.

In 1939, Bluford applied to the University of Missouri School of Journalism to do graduate work. She was accepted into

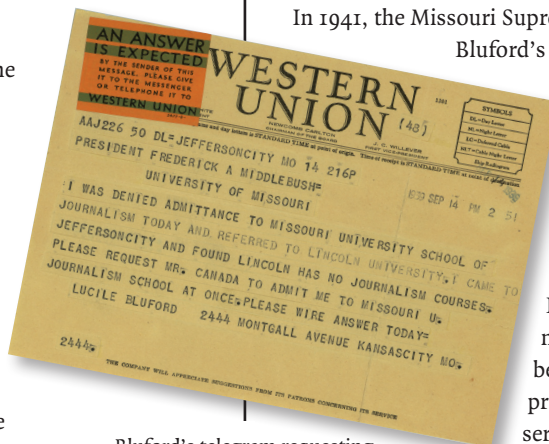


the program, but when she went to Columbia to enroll, she was turned away. University officials had not known that she was African American. The year before, Lloyd Gaines, an honors student from Lincoln University, had sued the University of Missouri to be accepted into its School of Law. After the United States Supreme Court ruled in his favor, Gaines mysteriously disappeared.

With the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Bluford worked to fight injustice against African Americans in higher education. She tried 11 times to enter the University of Missouri. She filed several lawsuits against the University but her case was denied each time.

In 1941, the Missouri Supreme Court finally ruled in Bluford's favor. The University of

Missouri had to admit her because no equal program existed at Lincoln University. In response, the School of Journalism closed its graduate program. It claimed that it could not operate properly because a majority of its professors and students were serving in World War II.



Bluford's telegram requesting admittance to the Missouri School of Journalism in 1939.

Though Bluford ended her legal battle with the University of Missouri, she kept fighting racism. She became a leading voice in the civil rights movement in Kansas City and helped make the *Call* one of the largest and most important black newspapers in the nation. Eventually, the University of Missouri honored her.

Bluford received an Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism from the School of Journalism and an honorary doctorate. Bluford said that she accepted the degree "not only for myself, but for the thousands of black students" the university had discriminated against over the years.

— Biography and photos courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri