

Senator, legend warrior, mourned

By Earl Byrd
AFRO Staff 4/19/83

State Sen. Clarence W. Blount proved during his 81 years that even an uneducated son of a North Carolina sharecropper could rise above his circumstances to become a tireless warrior for human dignity and an unceasing advocate for quality education for Black children.

Sen. Blount became a revered political figure after a lifetime of service. Now after fulfilling his destiny, he will be buried tomorrow on a quiet hill in Woodlawn Cemetery. He died April 12 from complications following a stroke.

"He lived a long and beautiful life," remembers state Sen. Lisa Gladden, tearfully. Gladden was Blount's political protégé. She was his choice to take his 41st District Senate seat in the Maryland General Assembly once he felt, after 31 years of battle, that his job was finally done.

"He fulfilled his mission and his purpose," said Gladden. "The Lord says a man has three score and 10, until you're 70 or so, and he made it past 80. Some people get to 70 and don't fulfill their purpose. But all that he was supposed to do, he did it. He came up in Jim Crow when the world told a Black man he couldn't be a success, said you can't do it, but he did it, and with his own style."

Gangly and wearing threadbare clothes, 10-year-old Clarence Blount couldn't read or write when he came to Baltimore. He dealt with his handicap by becoming a lone, but profound thinker who kept his age a secret at Douglass High School.

When he graduated, he was 21. Towering above everyone on that day, the 6-foot, 3-inch graduate vowed to continue

his education and make a difference in the lives of African Americans, especially children.

"He didn't indulge in verbiage and force," Larry Young remembers. "I would go to him after a tough fight on the floor and he would make me feel at ease and accept compromise."

"We didn't come down here to fight each other, but to find a common consensus," he'd say, and then ask, "Is your agenda more important than your objective?"

The old senator became so respected and admired, Young remembers. "It became difficult for Whites to say no, because if he couldn't sit at the table and bring home the bacon with his style, who could? He was the master of compromise, prudent and played good politics."

"I did what the Lord guided me to do," Blount once said. "I never wanted the headache of politics, but that's where the purse strings are controlled."

So he left Dunbar High School where he was principal and entered a new arena and to fight on a new front because his greatest desire in life was to help Black children.

He secured more than a million and a half scholarships for Black students, helped every historical Black college in the state, helped to get 19 bond bills passed for Black churches and created day care projects, programs for the elderly and Head Start.

"My reputation and good name has been built on my consistent delivery of good services," he once told an interviewer.

He showed how Black politicians could play the

game, helping Black judges get appointed in Baltimore City, as well as Howard, Harford and Montgomery counties, where there had been no Black representation.

"I am leaving with my legacy intact," he said recently, knowing that his final days were near. "God has been good."

All he wanted in the twilight of his life, he said, was to spend quality time with his wife, Gordine, who survives him, along with two sons and six grandchildren survive him.

His demeanor often inspired calm during unruly General Assembly sessions, but he was also a decorated hero of World War II.

When White soldiers tried to keep him from eating in a restaurant in Italy, he told them he came there to fight, and he was ready to die in that restaurant. And when he came home, he said he never forgot that he had fought abroad for a freedom he didn't have at home in America.

"We fought in every war this country ever had because we, too, are Americans." He

Cameron Miles, 40, outreach director for Advocates for Children and Youth, remembers Blount interceding with County Executive Rodger Hayden in 1991 to help him become the first African-American legislative analyst in Annapolis.

"He was a man of his word," Miles says, "and he had follow through."

Senator Young says, "He influenced my style and was a stealth bomber. He didn't play that. Nobody would give up two precincts to make another district whole, but Blount did. He believed in patronage, and let's his message sink in. "We did it so that we could have a seat at the table."

"He was the first Black man to represent northwest Baltimore," says Sen. Gladden. "He ran on an integrated ticket and won. He overcame his experiences in Italy, came home and couldn't sit in a dime store and have a cup of coffee. He understood

the fight for freedom and justice because he lived it.

"His political club," 5N5, produced Del. Nathaniel Oaks, Del. Pete Rawlings and Sen. Verda Welcome. He gave us our marching orders," she says.

if he thought a person was treated unfairly, he would go to the governor and say, 'Help the senator, I'll get mine next time.'

"There is no one selfless like that on the political scene today," Young says. "A school should be named after him, he lived his life bringing education dollars to Baltimore. It would have been nice to give him his flowers while he was living."

This gentle man, who concealed his warrior's heart so well, and won battles without seeming to have fired a shot, has, indeed, earned the right to rest in peace.