

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

SPEECH OF

HON. WILLIAM (BILL) CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 24, 1999

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Black History Month, I am honored to pay tribute to one of this century's greatest poets, a native of my home state of Missouri, the late Melvin B. Tolson (1898–1966). Tolson was a Renaissance man who spent his adult life in the East Texas Black Bible Belt. He was a man of prodigious talent, energy and accomplishment who was singularly devoted to championing the rights and the virtues of the common man. He served his fellow human beings in every way he could. Today he is remembered as a great teacher and a celebrated writer, but Melvin Tolson was also a painter, a cook, a waiter, a janitor, a shoeshine boy, a soldier, an actor, a boxer, a mayor, a newspaper columnist, a packing-house worker and even the poet laureate of Liberia.

Melvin Tolson was, above all, a committed humanist who devoted his life to enhancing the dignity of every human being. As an outspoken leader and champion of lost causes and underdogs, he organized black sharecroppers in the South and was known to narrowly escape a lynch mob on more than one occasion. Tolson spent more than forty years teaching at Wiley and Langston colleges where he coached championship winning Black College debate teams through a ten year winning streak during which they defeated Oxford along with two national champion teams. As a poet, Melvin Tolson's contributions to literature earned him only modest recognition toward the end of his lifetime. Like so many artists, his greatest critical acclaim came after his life ended.

Ralph Ellison, writing in "Shadow and Act", described the rich emotion of Tolson's "Richard Wright's Blues":

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing it from a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically . . . Their attraction lies in this, that they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit.

Mr. Speaker, Melvin Tolson is a source of inspiration to Black Americans. He is one of the shining stars of our history and one of this nation's greatest artists. Tolson created a poetic legacy. His writings will bless and enrich the lives of generations to come. I am happy to report that the Tolson Project has been established to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the works of Melvin B. Tolson and under its leadership, the "Collected Works of Melvin B. Tolson" will be re-issued this year. In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of this distinguished man's immortal words.

DELTA

Art
is not barrel copper easily separated

from the matrix
it is not fresh tissues
—for microscopic study—
one may fix:
unique as the white tiger's pink paws and
blue eyes,

Art

leaves her lover as a Komitas
deciphering intricate Armenia neums,
with a wild surmise.

RENDEZVOUS WITH AMERICA

I see Joe DiMaggio

As his bat cuts a vacuum in the paralyzed
air:

In brown Joe Louis, surged in white acclaim,
As he fights his country's cause in Madison
Square.

A TRIBUTE TO PATRICIA STAFF
OF ONALASKA, WISCONSIN**HON. RON KIND**

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 25, 1999

Mr. KIND. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Patricia Staff, a true hometown hero from Wisconsin.

Last month, Patricia Staff, who is a resident of my district, took action that potentially saved the life of a young student. Patricia is a school crossing guard in Onalaska, Wisconsin. On Friday, January 8, she was working at her usual crossing location at Quincy Street and Sand Lake Road in Onalaska. While helping students cross this busy intersection, she noticed a car swerving through traffic with no intention of stopping. Patricia quickly grabbed a young boy crossing the intersection and pulled him out of harms way. According to the police, Patricia's actions saved the child from certain injury and possibly death.

Every day, throughout our nation, dedicated men and women serve our country as school crossing guards. It is easy to overlook their work. The job they do, however, is vital to the millions of students who walk to school each day. Crossing guards assist students at busy intersections, they keep an eye out for strangers who may threaten children, they provide parents with the security of knowing their children are safe, and often they become good friends to the students. School crossing guards are essential to the safety and well-being of our children.

Patricia Staff is a tribute to the people of western Wisconsin and all crossing guards. Patricia Staff put the protection of those children going to school above all other concerns, and because of that she potentially saved a life. I rise today to commend Patricia Staff for her work, thank her for dedication to her community, and praise her as a true hero.

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE DICK DAY

HON. SCOTT MCINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 25, 1999

Mr. MCINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I wish to take this moment to recognize the remarkable life and significant achievements of one of Colorado's leading

journalists for the past thirty years, Dick Day. Tragically, Dick died in an automobile accident on December 8, 1998. While family, friends and colleagues remember the truly exceptional life of Dick, I, too, would like to pay tribute to this remarkable man and friend.

As the managing editor of the Montrose Daily Press for 31 years, Dick's work ethic was the stuff of legend. According to his colleagues, Dick never missed a day of work in his thirty plus years as managing editor. Often, Dick could be found reading reports off the press wire as early as 4:00 in the morning. Dick's unwavering dedication to the Daily Press has been described by those who worked under his leadership as "legendary" and "inspirational." Such accolades seem befitting a man who was widely recognized to be one of Colorado's most accomplished journalists.

As a native of Grand Junction and graduate of Grand Junction High School in 1958, Dick returned to the Grand Valley after leaving the Montrose Daily Press to become the special sections editor of the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel. In this capacity, Dick served with the same distinction and dedication that he had so readily demonstrated in his time with the Daily Press. And as was the case with his time at the Daily Press, the quality of Dick's work brought widespread acclaim both to himself and the Daily Sentinel.

Although his professional accomplishments will long be remembered and admired, most who knew him well will remember Dick Day, above all else, as a friend. It is clear that the multitude of those who have come to know Dick as a friend, including myself, will be worse off in his absence. However, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that, in spite of this profound loss, the family and friends of Dick Day can take solace in the knowledge that each is a better person for having known him.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
FOR ROBERT SHERMAN**HON. LOIS CAPPS**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 25, 1999

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, I rise to share with my colleagues the award for Lifetime Achievement that was presented to my remarkable constituent Bob Sherman by the Alumni Associations of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Bob Sherman, UCSB Class of 1947, has had a phenomenal record of success as a national and international senior tennis champion. He has won more senior tennis titles than all but one other player ever. Over the past thirty-five years there have been only a few in which he did not win a national or international championship. As recently as 1996 he won the singles Grand Slam. Yet in our hometown of Santa Barbara, he is better known as a very popular tennis pro and instructor who is eager to work with students of all ages.

Bob Sherman remains active and competitive, with many lifetimes of achievement remaining in his wonderful career. He is a member of the UCSB Athletic Hall of Fame and is a testimonial that excellence can be achieved at every age, and therefore an example to us all. I am proud to join my friends at UCSB in recognizing Bob Sherman's on-going lifetime of achievement.