

TRIBUTE TO DR. CONRAD L.
MALLETT, SR.

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 23, 1998

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Dr. Conrad L. Mallett, Sr., president emeritus of Capital Community-Technical College in Hartford, Connecticut. A noted educator, historian and culture bearer, Dr. Mallett entered the arenas of education and government service to press the fight for justice and equality for America's oppressed and overlooked citizens.

Although he and his wife, Dr. Claudia Jones Mallett, have spent the past 13 years in Connecticut, Dr. Mallett grew up and was educated in my hometown of Detroit, Michigan. That's where we first met. Our friendship has continued since.

Dr. Mallett is an African-American historian who still believes that our nation can live up to its glorious promises; he is a husband, father and grandfather who takes great joy in seeing his offspring dream dreams that he could not even imagine as a poor, black child raised by a widowed mother in the segregated South and later the intransigently rigid North.

Dr. Claudia Jones Mallett, his wife of 46 years, attributes his sterling character and his drive to his mother. "She was a very strong woman who was a domestic worker. She imparted to him steadfastness and the work ethic. He has a strong belief that it is education that brought African-Americans as far as they have gotten, and it is education that will move them further along.

"He believes that the more we are able to allow every person to become an educated person, the more successful we will be in our drive to become full citizens in this country. Whenever he has encountered barriers that get in the way of that goal of full citizenship, he has tried to move them out of the way."

Far more often than not, he has succeeded. Born in Ames, Texas, about 40 miles south of Houston, Dr. Conrad Mallett lost his father at age 10. His mother, Mrs. Lonnie Mallett, worked to support him and his sister, Nora. The family moved to Detroit in the early 1940s when Mrs. Mallett learned that domestics could earn twice as much in Detroit.

"Sometimes my husband tells a story about those days," Dr. Claudia Mallett recalled. "His mom sometimes would take him and his sister to work with her. They had to be very quiet while she worked because they were not supposed to be there, so they had nothing else to do but read. Both he and his sister are avid readers, and I don't think I know of any person who is more well read than my husband."

After graduating from Detroit's Miller High School, a young Conrad Mallett was drafted, trained in the South Pacific as an Army Air Corps engineer and eventually was stationed on Baffin Island, off the southern tip of Greenland.

After his honorable discharge, he returned to Detroit and started a steady climb toward his goal. While working at the U.S. Post Office, he used the GI Bill to take some courses at the Cass Tech Veterans Institute. After a few years, he left the post office ("I found it dull and unromantic") and began walking the

beat as a Detroit police officer. At the same time he enrolled in college full time.

"I say with some pride that the years from 1952-57 were the most productive of my life. I married, we had three children and I completed college and worked full time. Had it not been for my wonderful wife, I would not have been able to do any of those things," he said of those years. With the exception of one year when he received a scholarship from the Mott Foundation, he always held full-time jobs while earning his undergraduate and post graduate degrees. Today he holds a B.S. in Education and an Ed.D. in Education Administration from Wayne State University and an M.A. in American History from the University of Michigan.

The young ambitious father and husband was driven to succeed because, as he explained it, "I come from a generation that had as its goal surviving, dealing with a racist society, dealing with prejudice. We just tried to make it day to day.

"Today I take great pride that my grandchild can say, 'I will be the next Bill Gates or a doctor or a lawyer.' Those goals were not as accessible in the 1940s and 50s as they are now. I was always looking for a better quality of life, one with some dignity and respect."

Dr. Mallett still remembers how his high school counselor tried to steer him into carpentry even though he had expressed an interest in engineering. After graduating from college, Dr. Mallett taught American History and social studies in the Detroit Public Schools. In fact, he taught the first African-American history course offered in the Detroit District. After seven years, he left the school system and took a job as head of the training unit of Detroit anti-poverty program.

He may not have known it then, but Dr. Mallett was about to set off on a career that would earn him a shining reputation in public service and education. He had made sure he was prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that came his way. "If you are prepared, sometimes good things happen," he said. "It all goes back to the statement black parents made to their children during Reconstruction: Get as much education as you can because they can never take that away from you."

Dr. Mallett's commitment to social justice extends far beyond the job. For example, in 1964 a fund-raising benefit was scheduled in Detroit for the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. Dr. Mallett and his wife agreed to put their home on the line to cover the cost of renting Detroit's Cobo Hall if the benefit did not raise enough money to pay the rental fee.

In the 1960s Dr. Mallett became the first African-American Assistant to Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, a bold young Irish Catholic lawyer who, with the support of the black community, staged an upset victory over the incumbent mayor. "I had finished everything but the dissertation on my doctorate when I was appointed to that job," Dr. Mallett said.

As Director of the city's Department of Housing and Urban Renewal, Dr. Mallett helped steer the city through the turbulent 1960s.

When Cavanagh left office, Dr. Mallett came to the attention of Wayne State University which needed someone with experience in public housing to oversee its building expansion. The University Board of Governors appointed him Director of Community Extension

Services and then Director of the Office of Neighborhood Relations.

In 1973, he was named Vice President for Academic Affairs at Wayne County Community College, Michigan's largest community college. He served in that position until 1977 when Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, the first African-American Mayor of Detroit, tapped him to be director of the Detroit Department of Streets, Traffic and Transportation. Six years later, academia called again. Dr. Mallett left Detroit to serve as Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs at the Community College of Baltimore, a position he held until 1985 when he was appointed President of the Capital Region Community College District in Hartford, Connecticut. Upon the dissolution of the regional district, he was appointed President of the Greater Hartford Community College. In 1992, he became the first President of Capital Community-Technical College, a comprehensive, publicly funded two-year college program offering career, technical and transfer programs. On June 30, 1996, he retired as president emeritus.

Recipient of many academic honors and leadership awards, he was named Educational Administrator of the Year by the Black Educational Administrators Association while at Wayne County Community College. The Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments presented him with its Distinguished Service Award. In recognition of his exemplary leadership, he received the Anthony Wayne Award from Wayne State University.

Throughout their marriage, Dr. Mallett and his wife, now a retired science teacher, always kept their primary focus on their three children. Conrad Mallett, Jr. is Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court; Lydia Mallett, Ph.D., is Director of corporate Diversity of the General Mills Corporation, and Veronica Mallett, M.D., is a faculty member at Wayne State University Medical School in Detroit and is pursuing advanced research in obstetrical and gynecological surgery.

Though the children were raised in a middle-class environment, they were never allowed to forget the historic struggles and sacrifices that led to their lifestyle. Justice Mallett said he will never forget a trip he and his dad took to Houston, Texas. "I was 17 years old, and that's not exactly the time you want to make a cross-country trip with your dad. But when we got to Houston, my dad said we were having dinner that night at the Rice Hotel. He said I had to put on a suit. It was August, and Houston was about 199 degrees. It was so hot. When I asked why we had to go inside to eat, my dad said, 'Because I never walked in the front door of the Rice Hotel. I was a bellboy there and made it all the way up to be bell captain, but I never walked in through the front door.'" That night they both walked in through the front door.

Justice Mallett said his father brought a fierce integrity to the process of public service delivery. "He said that you may not always be able to do your best for everyone, but in general those persons less able than you to fend for themselves are the ones to whom you must give your best." And that, Mr. Speaker, is how Dr. Conrad Mallett, Sr. lives his life. Our nation is richer because of his contributions.