



**THE REV.
DR. SAMUEL B. MCKINNEY**

**“We’re not in
Heaven yet”**

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who ARE we?

Washington’s Kaleidoscope

THE REV. DR. SAMUEL B. MCKINNEY
“We’re Not in Heaven Yet.”

By Trova Heffernan

This short biography was produced by Legacy Washington as part of the **“Who ARE We: Washington’s Kaleidoscope”** exhibit, presented in 2016. From the exhibit prologue:

Washington is a kaleidoscope of more than 7 million people—each with a unique story to tell.

Is there a quintessential Washingtonian? Hardly. History has made clear that we’re more than our identity—more than techies or coffee lovers or outdoor enthusiasts. We’re a kaleidoscope, a cultural melting pot. We live in a place constantly reinventing itself.

Since Native Americans left the first human footprints on the landscape thousands of years ago, Washingtonians have continually risen above adversity. Today you’ll meet fascinating figures who’ve fought for our civil rights, advocated for the disabled, protected our environment, defended our nation and pushed the boundaries of innovation.

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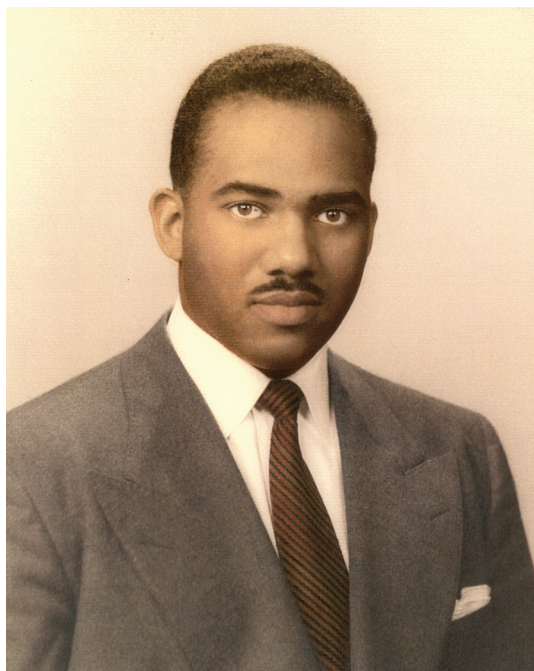
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“And what does the LORD require of you? But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

They used to say Seattle was a long way from everywhere, a far-flung and hopeful place if you happened to be black. They used to say it was another world from the Deep South where race split society at the core and dark skin could still earn you a lynching.

Samuel McKinney, then on a 30-year walk with God, arrived in the city far from everywhere in the winter of 1957. “The frontier spirit, in a sense, is still alive,” the minister said of the



Samuel McKinney grew up in a household where education was revered: “Both of my parents had degrees beyond college before I was born. That didn’t happen in too many families, especially black families, but that was the case.” *McKinney family collection*

Pacific Northwest. But nearly a century after Lincoln freed millions of slaves, in an ostensibly progressive city, McKinney found freedom elusive. He found blacks banned from restaurants and hotels. He found them in dead-end jobs or unemployed. He found them running from the South and crimes “real or imagined.” The vast majority were confined to four square miles of modest homes—some tidy, some ramshackle—and many built more



In Seattle, a young McKinney becomes actively involved with CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). CORE, a force for social justice in the city, organizes this demonstration at a realtor’s office in 1964. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

than 50 years before. Then he began house hunting himself. “Are you colored?” the realtor asked.

McKinney, a third-generation Baptist minister, had grown up in Cleveland, Ohio hearing his father preach the Social Gospel with such fervent passion that it passed down the family tree to him. It rose up years later, on the streets of Seattle, where he led boycotts against companies for refusing to hire minorities and protests against the city for refusing to open housing. The pastor who would one day call attention to the rebellious acts of Jesus—the Lord “raised some Holy Hell,” McKinney would write admiringly—challenged injustice on the streets of his hometown. “The white majority should not decide on my basic rights!” he hollered to thousands on a muddy day in Seattle. When an intimidating church leader in Seattle reneged on plans to host Martin Luther King, Jr., then deemed a radical by whites and blacks alike, McKinney threatened to go public with the truth “so help me God!”

Then he paid a price. He watched garbage cans shatter his windows. He cleaned feces off the glass. He spotted Black Panthers outside his home, their pointed rifles as visible as their black berets. He comforted his anxious daughter when kids on the school bus jeered, “I hear they’re going to kill your daddy.” After a decade, McKinney concluded that racial unrest in the Pacific Northwest didn’t mirror the Deep South, but it “certainly wasn’t the Promised Land.”

This was the place where the Seattle pastor lost his friend and ally, Edwin T. Pratt. Pratt, the executive director of the Seattle Urban League leafed through the paper on a chilly January night in 1969. Snow clung to the boughs of the Douglas firs outside his rambler in the Shoreline neighborhood north of Seattle. At approximately 8:55 p.m., a thud interrupted the quiet. It sounded like a snowball whacking the siding. “It was a Sunday,” McKinney remembers. “And somebody kept throwing snow, throwing snowballs against his house.” Pratt lived in a mostly white neighborhood.

The civil rights activist, just 38, rose warily from his sofa. “Who’s there?” Pratt asked. It was over as soon as he opened his front door. The warning from his wife—“Look out, they’ve got a rifle!”—came too late.

Pratt’s daughter, 5, had just been tucked into bed when the blast from a 12-gauge shotgun launched an investigation into one of Seattle’s most notorious unsolved murders. Clues were scant—a couple of men crouched behind a sedan in the carport, a set of tire tracks, scattered footprints in the snow. The getaway car could have been a late-model Buick with a dark-vinyl top, but no one was certain. The assailants “looked like kids. They were young. It was the way they ran—the gait,” someone said.

News of the assassination spread quickly. “There were a lot of calls on the phone and people started showing up at the house,” remembers Dr. Lora-Ellen McKinney, the minister’s eldest daughter. “For a while, our home was always filled with a bunch of men in dark suits. But let me say this: the day that Pratt was killed didn’t feel much different than any other day. This was a murder, but painful and challenging things were

happening all the time. The men in dark suits, which is how I viewed the community leaders with whom my father worked, would show up after a rash of phone calls. There’d be a conclave and they would leave the house and get to work.”

McKinney decided he would assist Pratt’s widow and drive to the Shoreline home, roped off and swarmed by officers. “Then I had a call from one of the police and he told me not to leave home. I said, ‘Am I in some trouble?’ He told me, ‘Don’t leave home.’ ”

The telephone was ringing again inside McKinney’s brick home in Madrona, just east of downtown Seattle. His 8-year-old daughter, Rhoda Eileen, was usually discouraged from answering the home telephone. But that night she picked up the receiver.

“McKinney residence, Rhoda speaking. May I help you?”

“Little girl, your daddy is next.” Rhoda let out a scream. She’d remember that night the next 46 years.

Pratt’s assassins—behind a murder-for-hire authorities would later say—were on the run. Seattle Police placed McKinney and eight other civil rights activists on an official watch list. One day officers pulled McKinney over on his typical route. “They asked me where I was going and I wanted to know why. I didn’t take the route that I usually took that day. I deviated. Threw them a curve. They were watching and trailing. I did find out later that there *was* something that was planned. Anybody black and in a leadership position, I understand there was a threat on them.”

McKinney agonized over the safety of his wife and his children, but leaned on his faith. “One of the ways some forces function is that they put fear into you. You back off and they have won.” The pastor resolved to keep going. “They can kill a person, but they can’t stop a movement.”

The Rev. Dr. Samuel B. McKinney, 89, is a memorable man, with a trademark goatee and frameless glasses. Surrounded by an array of glass awards and a replica of the Seattle street sign that now bears his name, McKinney wastes no time setting the record straight. He’s first and foremost a minister. Not a bel-

low-blast-and-boom preacher who shouts in the sanctuary on Sundays and retreats to his church office. McKinney is a man of his community seven days a week, a fighter for justice.

He's still fighting. Just a few years ago, at a vigil in Seattle for Trayvon Martin, McKinney wore a crimson-and-gray hoodie—a can of iced tea in one hand and a bag of skittles in the other. Then he denounced the Florida teenager's killing and his shooter's acquittal: "We may not be faced with Jim



In more than a century, no pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church has continuously preached longer than the Rev. Dr. Samuel B. McKinney.
McKinney family collection

Crow, but we have to deal with Jim Crow's grandson." When furor surrounded the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, the fiery former pastor of President Obama and a close personal friend of McKinney's, the Seattle Baptist came to his defense. "An attack on this man of God is an attack on all those of the cloth who believe in the social Gospel of liberation. And I will not stand for it. Not on my watch. Not today." McKinney has never been one to shy away from controversy, especially where justice is concerned. As the Rev. Dr. Gardner Taylor, the dean of American black preachers put it, fighting for what's right might be part of McKinney's DNA.

Frequently told he looks remarkably well for his age, McKinney offers a laugh. "Looking good is not my problem." Life has thrown him his share of curve balls—McKinney is



Still outspoken, McKinney tells a Seattle crowd at a prayer vigil for Trayvon Martin: "We have to tell the truth whether we like it or not, and we have to face up to the reality of what is." *McKinney family collection*

a two-time cancer survivor. He became critically ill last June and nearly died. McKinney's striking gray eyes have faded with time, and his voice has quieted. But his agile mind is especially evident when he recalls the Seattle civil rights scene of the 1960s for which he is best known. To truly understand Samuel Berry McKinney, however, you must trace his roots south of the Mason-Dixon Line and west to Middle America.

Like millions, McKinney's ancestors fled the Deep South between the wars, during the Great Migration. McKinney's grandfather toiled in the fields as a sharecropper. As the story goes, Wade Hampton McKinney I had trudged more than 60 miles from the mountainous city of Walhalla, South Carolina, to the sprawling cotton fields of northeast Georgia. "You would get land according to the size of your family," McKinney explains. "The more children you had, the more hands could work." Wade fathered a dozen, a small army of calloused hands to pick cotton and harvest rice. One year, a violent tussle ensued between the landowner, Andrew Thompson, and Wade's son, George McKinney. "Thompson put out a posse after him," says Lora-Ellen. "George tried to defend himself and might have killed a couple of people in getting away." George, 19, fled to Ohio. His younger brother Wade, Samuel's father, left for school.

There weren't many public schools open to blacks in 1910 Georgia. Wade Hampton McKinney II had enrolled at Atlanta Baptist College, renamed Morehouse College in 1913. Wade was an 18-year-old student at Morehouse with only a fifth-grade

education. He'd found the courage to enroll after a pastor urged him to make something of his life. Wade studied at the school for the next 10 years, learning to right the wrongs of society. He advanced to Rochester Theological Seminary. In 1923, Wade was called to a church in Flint. The economy boomed in that Michigan town, but Jim Crow lived. The newly installed pastor began using the power of the pulpit to further the African American struggle for equality.



Wade Hampton McKinney II with the Morehouse College debate team, circa 1910s. *McKinney family collection*

The fight for justice found Samuel McKinney as a boy, listening to his father's sermons and praying to God in his Sunday best. The fight forged there, over a childhood of Sundays, in the solid oak pews of Cleveland's Antioch Baptist Church, where the family had settled.

Sure, McKinney had outside influences that shaped his thinking, strengthened his pride in his roots. He lived down the street from Jesse Owens, the Negro youth who jumped and sprinted his way to four Olympic Gold Medals in 1936, at the height of Nazi power. "Ready, set, go!" McKinney and the neighbor kids yelled from an imaginary starting line outside Owens' home.

McKinney rescued a heavysset lady who brought the front porch down when Joe Louis knocked out Max Schmeling in the first round of their boxing match. "We were pulling boards back and her legs were all skinned, but she just was so happy," McKinney remembers with a chuckle. "People can't understand it, but when Joe Louis won a fight our race of people won."

McKinney found most of his inspiration in the words of American civil rights leaders, the guest lecturers who spoke at his father’s church and slept at the house when the hotels turned them away. But no one had a more profound impact on the young McKinney than his own father. As Samuel grew, the Rev. Dr. Wade Hampton McKinney II evolved into one of the most influential ministers in Cleveland.



McKinney “grew up north” in Cleveland, OH as the son of a prominent minister. *McKinney family collection*

He was a tell-it-like-it-is social justice preacher. In 1946, after a mass lynching in Georgia, Wade marched the city streets and lamented with unflinching candor, “The southern states lynch our bodies, but we know that others lynch our very souls with discrimination and segregation. ... The unjustified wave of murders which have swept this country—the price paid by these martyrs—cannot be avenged or stopped by mere words, or by mere prayers alone.”

In 1952, while Clevelanders grappled with housing problems, high crime and white flight, Wade called out his fellow ministers, “You can’t solve a problem which you help create by your own cowardice. When Negroes move into an area you move out—despite your instructions to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Wade held all blacks accountable for change. He named one sermon “Cleveland’s 148,000 Cry-Babies” and compared some Negroes to lost children. He took the city mayor to task for paying more attention to mass transit than adequate housing for African Americans. “I can almost hear the victims who have been burned to death in these dilapidated fire traps shouting, ‘Amen’ to what I am saying. Their blood is on somebody’s hand and I hope it

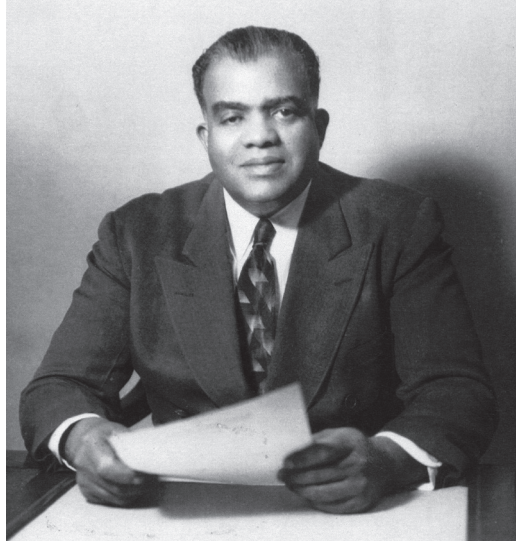
is on somebody's conscience as well."

In 1955, when two whites led Martin Luther King, Jr. away in handcuffs after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Wade wrote the civil rights leader. "Among the many things of which I am sure are these:

1. Prayer changes things. 2. Money talks. You have my prayers, but how can we get some money to you without violating the laws of your state?" It was the lesson the son learned from his father: Prayer is fundamental, but the pocketbook just might be the most sensitive organ in the human anatomy.

When he died in 1963, it was clear that Wade McKinney's faith in God had never waned, and he was a great fisher of men. The elder McKinney had quadrupled his church membership, traveled the world on behalf of the Baptist Church and infused in his son Samuel the mission of a lifetime. "He had been raised to understand that you must lend your gift in the best way you can," says Lora-Ellen. "If there is an injustice, you must fix it."

The incalculable faith of his mother shaped young Samuel. To this day, he says she's the finest Christian he's ever known. Highly intelligent and the daughter of a Baptist minister, Ruth Berry McKinney was a rising star in the church. She was president of the Greater Cleveland Council of American Baptist Women, goodwill messenger for the American Baptist Foreign Mission Societies and the first black woman to be named second vice president of the American Baptist Convention. In



"He took a lot of stands," McKinney says of his father. "He stood up for justice. Morehouse College produced a lot of people who became social justice advocates." *McKinney family collection*



Nothing took the place of family for Ruth McKinney, the first black woman to hold key positions in the Baptist Church. "She was a mother and her children came first," McKinney says. *McKinney family collection*

1964, Ruth served on the Women's Committee of the Baptist World Alliance.

Ruth was always a loving, ever-present mother, McKinney says, but she believed in punishment. She used the switch without compunction, sending her kids off to claim the switch before recalling the most minor indiscretion with pinpoint accuracy and lightning speed.

"How can you keep all that mess I did in

your mind?" Samuel would ask his mother. " 'On such and such a date you did this, such and such a date you did that.' "

Through the years, McKinney's reconsidered his mother's firm hand and concluded he needed the discipline. His mother was fair and clear with expectations. "Don't waste time with half-stepping," she'd tell him. "When you're behind in a race, you have to run faster than the persons up front just to stay in the race, and even to get ahead."



Prone to occasional mischief, McKinney says he could not escape the firm hand of his mother or her quick recall of his indiscretions. But she was the "finest Christian" he's ever known. *McKinney family collection*



McKinney (left) and older brother Wade grew up with twins Virginia Ruth and Mary Louise. “My father said, ‘I don’t care what they do to you, don’t you touch them!’” McKinney laughs. “So they felt they could get away with anything.” *McKinney family collection*

Growing up, McKinney witnessed disparities between the races—price gouging at grocery stores in black neighborhoods, housing ordinances that banned people of color from neighborhoods, even a segregated blood supply.

McKinney was in high school during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Patriotism soared, but McKinney quickly became disheartened. The American Red Cross advertised a nationwide blood drive to assist in the war effort,

but banned African American blood. The policy triggered natural furor. When the relief organization began segregating blood from black and white donors, McKinney was still disgusted. He refused to donate to the Red Cross or his school fundraising effort on its behalf. “There are only four types of human blood that flow in all of our veins,” McKinney said. “They don’t accept my blood, they don’t need my money.”

McKinney also encountered racism in the military. He was drafted during the second semester of his freshman year at Morehouse College. It was 1945 and the U.S. Army was still segregated. After basic training, and en route to Arizona, McKinney’s train pulled into a small town in Texas. Blacks were led to a colored dining room and instructed to eat with wooden knives and cardboard plates.

“Look here,” someone said.

“We looked into the white dining room,” McKinney remembers. “They had silverware, cut glass stemware, tablecloths and German prisoners of war at the table. They were

white. I had on a United States Army uniform. I was angry.”

“How far is it to Cleveland?” Private McKinney asked.

“About 1,800 miles. Are you thinking about going AWOL?”

“I’m thinking about going A-WAY.”

On the brink of Samuel McKinney’s first trip to the Deep South, he packed his clothes in a footlocker and listened to the parting words of his father: “If you turn out to be half the man I am, you’ll do well.” “He was throwing that gauntlet of a challenge to me, which I accepted,” McKinney says.

McKinney was bound for the outskirts of Atlanta and Morehouse College. “We were young and looking for a good time, but we were also faced with the reality of what was. It was still, in 1944, the racist, segregated South. My parents talked to me about staying out of trouble. They knew I had a big mouth.”

McKinney saw an altogether different world in Atlanta—colored and white drinking fountains, colored and white restrooms, the occasional run-in with an unfriendly salesman. One of them threw shoes at him after querying his size. At the city’s oldest social club, McKinney witnessed retaliation by black food-service workers who quietly took umbrage at racist comments. “Officers who were white would get together



Wade Hampton McKinney II and his son Samuel, one of the only father-son pairings honored with portraits in the Morehouse College International Hall of Honor. *Ho-Eun Chung*

and talk about how their Negro troops were doing. They forgot there were blacks who worked there.” The black workers would doctor the food they served them. Sometimes the white officers “would get sick and have to be replaced.”

Once settled into life at Morehouse, McKinney rekindled a friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr., a fellow minister’s son who’d enrolled before formally graduating from high school. “How could you enter college at 15? World War II was on,” McKinney says. “The enrollment for males was down all over the country. The State of Georgia came up with a law that if you took a test in the eleventh grade and passed it, you could bypass the twelfth grade and go directly into college.”

King’s reputation at Morehouse did not match the reverence that later surrounded him when he became a storied civil rights leader. Though he stood 5-9 as an adult, the 15-year-old King was called “Runt” by his peers. The author of one of his-
tory’s most celebrated speeches had yet to win a single oratori-



Their longtime friendship influenced McKinney’s life. McKinney met Martin Luther King Jr. when they were boys at religious conventions trying to escape the “hot air” of their preacher fathers.
McKinney family collection

cal contest. “He took part in every oratorical contest on the campus at that time. And didn’t win,” McKinney remembers.

Their friendship predated college. McKinney says he’d bump into King at religious conventions when they were young boys trying to escape all the “hot air” from their preacher fathers. Their lives took similar turns. Both followed their fathers to Morehouse. Both were swayed to the ministry by Dr. Benjamin Mays, the

college president who introduced King to Gandhian philosophy. Later, in 1954, both were up for the same job. The Pulpit Committee at Montgomery’s famous Dexter Avenue Baptist Church was vetting two candidates to assume the role of its lead pastor: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Samuel Berry McKinney. King would later accept the offer, directing the well-known bus boycott from the church office. McKinney says he never seriously considered a move south and adds with a grin: “I asked the Lord if he would go with me from Cleveland to Montgomery and he said he would go as far as Cincinnati.”

When Samuel McKinney first took the pulpit in Seattle in 1958, World War II had changed the face of the city. Wartime jobs had grown the black population a whopping 300 percent in a single decade. From his new post at Mount Zion Baptist Church—among the oldest and largest black churches in the state—McKinney sized up his congregation and his new community. “A lot of African Americans were trying to run away from their history or deny it when I first came here,” McKinney says. “There was a term they used—‘escapist Negroes.’ ”

Most lived and worked in the Central Area, a once most-



The Central Area, home to most of the city’s blacks, is among the oldest neighborhoods in Seattle. Restrictive covenants forced most people of color to live in the district. Open housing would not pass in Seattle until 1968. *Seattle P-I*

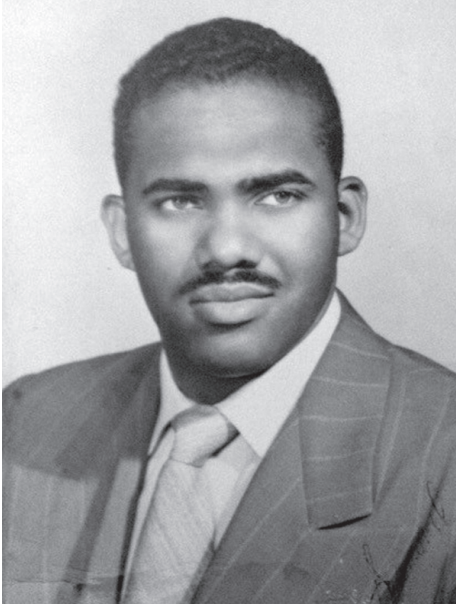


McKinney begins the first day of more than 40 years at Seattle's famous Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Above, McKinney with his parents, daughter Lora-ellen, wife Louise and his great aunt-, Ada Berry. *McKinney family collection*

ly Jewish neighborhood between Lake Washington and the Central Business District. Barber shops, doctor's offices and restaurants owned by African Americans were now neighborhood fixtures.

Many people of color lived in the neighborhood's low-rise apartments, bungalows or aging wood-framed walkups. The houses were either "plain and bulky" or "plain and shack-like," as one resident put it. And there were pockets of neglect. But restrictive covenants banned minorities from many other Seattle neighborhoods. McKinney and his wife Louise spent six months house hunting, often encountering realtors who'd brazenly ask their color of skin over the phone.

Even at the grocery store in 1958 Seattle, McKinney found a tense racial climate, the occasional surge of uneasiness among white patrons. He'd stand in line with his cart and notice the white shopper ahead of him wheeling away. "No, no, I can wait," a patron told him on more than one occasion. "They were afraid somebody might come" in and stage a hold-up, McKinney says. "They didn't want to be in the line of the shooting."



McKinney has leaned on his faith all his life, taking to heart the words of his favorite Bible verse: “And what does the LORD require of you? But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8
McKinney family collection

Many black Seattleites were unemployed or working dead-end or low-paying jobs. They sent their children—some 9,000 in the 1960s—to nearly all-black schools. In an era of de facto segregation, 80 percent of African American students attended a small cluster of schools, usually in or near the Central Area.

“Every part of this country has been affected by racism,” McKinney says. “A lot of folks have had social amnesia since it was better than the place they came from. People thought when they got here they were in the

Promised Land. I don’t know what had been promised to them. The problem has been here all the time. It’s the same here as anywhere else. The difference is a matter of degree.”

Like his father, the pastor used the power of the pulpit to push for change. “The church provides the crowds. It is part of a system that has a long history of operation. History will tell you that every slave insurrection movement was led by a Negro preacher. Championing the cause of civil rights has always been part of the function of a Negro minister.”

McKinney devoted his time to organizations on the frontlines of the civil rights battlefield: the Friends Against Racial Discrimination, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Central Area Civil Rights Committee and the Greater Council of Churches. His seminal achievement, however, came about in 1961.

The \$3,000 check was sent a year earlier, “unsought, unre-

quested and unsolicited” from McKinney and other clergymen. But it prompted a telling question from McKinney’s former Morehouse classmate: “What do you want?” asked Martin Luther King, Jr., now a national figure.

The Brotherhood of Mount Zion Baptist Church had invited the civil rights leader to give a series of speeches in Seattle. King, 32, was controversial. He’d received threatening phone calls. His home in Montgomery had been bombed. He’d survived a stabbing attempt during a book signing in Harlem. But McKinney believed the country’s leading voice for civil rights would send the right message to Seattle at the right time. “A lot of people had never seen him and wanted to hear him. We wanted him to come in and address us here. And he agreed.”

The forthcoming King visit to Seattle sparked controversy. Conservative blacks worried his visit would trigger racial disputes. Some of McKinney’s parishioners found anti-King material on their desks at Boeing. One parent of a student at Garfield High School, where King was scheduled to speak, raised concerns about the leader’s rumored ties to the Communist Party.

McKinney wrote King, alerting him of circumstances surrounding his scheduled tour. “An extreme conservative right-wing element, whose presence is a known factor on the west coast, have been quite vocal about your coming. The total community, which far exceeds the Negro population of 27,000, is quite aroused over some incidents that have occurred relative to your visit here. We have worked exceedingly hard to gain city-wide support for your first visit to the Pacific Northwest, and that support is guaranteed now more than ever.”

While King’s entire visit was controversial, one stop proved especially contentious. In 1961, Seattle was inundated with massive construction projects for the Century 21 Exposition. The 1962 World’s Fair limited the number of available venues that could accommodate large crowds. McKinney settled on Seattle First Presbyterian Church at 8th and Madison, a great barnlike building that could hold some 3,000 people. He counted on a gentleman’s agreement and began publicizing the speech. “We got closer to it and started announcing it,” McKinney says. “There was some kickback at the church.”

First Presbyterian canceled the speech, triggering an unforgettable encounter between McKinney and the church lay leader who was also a lawyer. The imposing attorney, with his 6-2 frame and white flowing mane, had a "voice that could strike fear in judge and jury."

McKinney can still hear his booming voice: "You did not follow proper procedures. But I know you've spent money. Give us a bill and we'll pay for it."

"We didn't come down here asking for any money," McKinney told him. "We don't want your money."

"What did you say?"

"You heard me. Nobody told us that there were any hoops to jump through, papers to sign and documents. You never told us that. But that's okay, Dr. King will be in town, he will speak. And I think I ought to let you know—this is not a threat—but we are going to tell the world about what happened."

"Well, tell the truth," the attorney responded.

"Nothing but the truth, so help me God!"

"Right is right," McKinney says. "We had an agreement and we were upholding our end of the bargain. Now you want to back down because some folks are bigoted and racist and don't want to have Dr. King speak here."

"You'll look back and thank them," King said when he heard the news. "Some people can kick you upstairs when they're trying to put you downstairs."



During his historic visit in 1961, King tells throngs of Seattleites, "In order for democracy to live, segregation must die." *Washington State Archives, Sam Smith papers*

The cancellation generated headlines.

King's November visit would mark his only visit to Seattle and the last time he would travel alone. He reported bomb threats on the airplanes he flew and suspicious-looking men who seemed to be tailing him in Chicago and Birmingham.

When he arrived that November, the prominent figure's message of nonviolence, his plea to President Kennedy to outlaw segregation by executive order, his admonition that young people were imperative to the movement, were met with roaring applause all over Seattle. To some 2,000 University of Washington students packed into Meany Hall, King said, "The student movements have done more to save the soul of the nation than anything I can think of. ... We've broken loose from the Egypt of slavery and stand on the border of the promised land of integration."

"His was a voice that needed to be heard," McKinney says. "We were going through some difficult times. You had the feeling that you knew you were doing the right thing and somebody had to stand up for it."

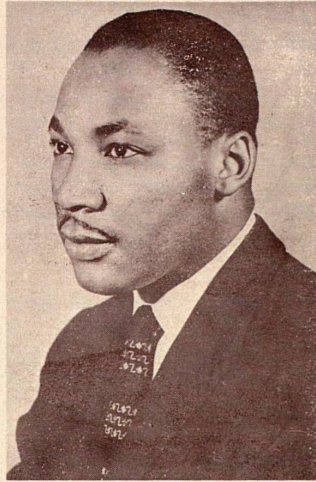
King gave two assemblies at Garfield High School and revved up a packed house at Eagles Auditorium with such force one onlooker said "the hall was shaking—literally."

King and McKinney later pulled up chairs at Mitchell's Bar-be-cue where they talked for hours. "Dr. King loved barbecue. He didn't want to go to anybody's home, but if I could take him to that place where I showed him good barbecue he'd love it. We were there until four o'clock in the morning. People were walking in off the street and I think he ordered everything on the menu."

Thirty-seven years later, as McKinney prepared to retire, he spotted an envelope from Seattle First Presbyterian Church in a stack of mail. At first, he tossed the unopened envelope in the file, but something told him to read the letter. "Thirty seven or thirty eight years ago," it stated, "a grave injustice was done to your church and to you, and we wish to apologize for that."

McKinney immediately called the church minister, who

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joked, “I think I’m a little younger than you. I’ll come up there.”

When the minister reached 19th and Madison, McKinney told him, “You know, a lot of whites say that this is unnecessary. Their ancestors never owned slaves, so we don’t owe you an apology for anything. That’s what some have said. And not even apologize for white privilege, those feelings that certain things are automatically yours because of who you are.”

McKinney and his wife Louise invited the minister to his retirement banquet where he was introduced and thanked.

The Civil Rights Movement exploded in 1963 with the assassination of Medgar Evers by a Klan member and King’s “I-have-a-dream” address before throngs of supporters, a quarter-million in all, on the National Mall. In Seattle, McKinney stood before 75 key pastors, priests and rabbis in the basement of his Seattle church. He asked them to commit, then and there, to the cause of liberty and justice for all—a self-evident truth, as the Founders put it.

The 1960s had ushered in a wave of protests, rallies and boycotts on the streets of Seattle. McKinney worked for the cause day and night. He remembers an elderly woman



Inspired by the assassination of Medgar Evers, black clergymen lead hundreds of demonstrators—black and white alike—on a march for civil rights from Mount Zion Baptist Church to Westlake Mall. McKinney, a key organizer, is somewhere in the crowd. *Seattle Municipal Archives*

who’d find a two-dollar bill and hand it to him without explanation. “I’m counting on you,” her face seemed to say. McKinney would shoot pool with a neighbor to clear his head on rare occasions. But more typically, he left in the morning before his girls arose and returned after they fell into sleep. “I called him my on-again-off-again-gone-

again Daddy because I didn't see him, even when he was in town," says Lora-Ellen. "We only played one time. I remember we spent a part of the afternoon downstairs in the laundry room making a kite and we took it to the park across the street. It got up in the air and it rained. That was the end of that. I knew that he was working on things that were important, that helped people that were significant for the world. And so it was a sacrifice in our family to make, that we wouldn't see him."

McKinney led boycotts against large companies like Safeway, distributing fliers that read "Don't shop where you can't work!" and negotiating deals with company management. He organized protests against department stores that included The Bon Marche and Frederick & Nelson. "The big march on Frederick & Nelson really opened up a lot of doors," McKinney recalls. "I remember one fellow, he was a member of our congregation, and he was highly critical of me and my participation, and told us we shouldn't march against Frederick & Nelson. But when we did and were successful, he was one of the first persons who applied for a job."

Later, in 1966, the Baptist minister co-founded the Seattle Opportunity Industrialization Center in the basement of his church. The training center equipped minorities who were unemployed or underemployed with the life and job skills necessary to compete in the workforce. The Seattle program replicated the national OIC founded in an abandoned jailhouse in 1964. McKinney became a prominent figure in the national organization and served as its national vice president. By 1970, nearly a thousand students found work through the Seattle OIC. It was just the beginning. "We were able to, for 20 years, train people, and build a facility at 22nd and Jackson," McKinney says.

The pastor also waged protests against the city of Seattle and then-Mayor Gordon Clinton for the administration's sluggish pace on open housing. "We're going to get there with or without your help," McKinney threatened during one rally. A realtor countered, "It is disheartening for us to see clergymen jumping on the bandwagon for forced housing. If the clergymen failed to achieve a change of hearts in their own congre-



They came by the hundreds in Seattle to support King's dream. On that same historic day in August 1963, McKinney stood a few feet away from the civil rights leader as he delivered his most famous address in Washington, D.C. *MOHAI*

Act. Years later, the commission co-chair recognized the pastor's work: "The Seattle Human Rights Commission owes a debt of gratitude to the Rev. Dr. McKinney for forging the path of the Commission for justice and human dignity."

McKinney and Mount Zion Baptist Church were on the front lines of a two-day boycott of Seattle Schools in the spring of 1966. Fed up with lower test scores, inadequate classroom funding and years of failed attempts at desegregating the district, organizers directed thousands of students to boycott public schools and attend Freedom Schools set up in the Central Area. The 1966 boycott, which drew hundreds to McKinney's church, forced the Seattle School Board to adopt many programs requested by its leaders. Mandatory busing finally came along in 1978.

All told, the fight for justice left its emotional scars on the McKinney family who endured constant scrutiny and a barrage of threats. Dissidents lashed out. In particular, McKinney

gations, how can they expect to bring it about by law?"

McKinney and other ministers led one march at City Hall in July 1963 that resulted in a daylong sit-in at the mayor's office and the creation of a proposed Human Rights Commission. McKinney, one of a dozen original members and two blacks to serve on the commission, would see Seattle finally adopt open housing after the assassination of Dr. King in 1968 and the passage of the federal Fair Housing

remembers the racial slurs of one late-night caller: “Do you preach nigger’s funerals?” he’d taunt before hanging up.

“Do you preach niggers’ funerals?” came the same slur on another night.

The minister responded and hung up.

The man promptly called back. “What did you say?”

“Did your mama die?” McKinney repeated.

McKinney never heard from that caller again. “Most of those people are cowards,” he says. “We had our share of threats. They went with the territory. That’s the price you had to pay. We had rocks and fecal matter thrown at the house. Some people were fearful for their kids to be our babysitters. They didn’t want anything to happen to their kids. That’s part of the price. My wife and I talked about it often. I’m glad she was not like some wives who say, ‘I can’t put up with this. I’m out of here.’ She wasn’t that way, she was very supportive.”

Both McKinney girls were hassled on the playground, pulled from school after enduring verbal or physical attacks.

The threats that alarmed them most came from the Seattle chapter of the Black Panthers. Rhoda McKinney-Jones says her father’s non-violent approach to the struggle made him a target: “There *was* a place for the Black Panthers, but in Seattle they made our lives miserable. They would march in front of our house with rifles. I was a kid who just wanted to go outside and make mud pies.”



Lora-Ellen McKinney with her parents. *McKinney family collection*

Lora-Ellen says she was once called to the headmaster's office at St. Nicholas School and shocked to discover a leader of the Black Panthers holding a rifle, quoting Karl Marx and "railing about the fact that this school was illegitimate and an elite establishment. I was there all day."

When McKinney saw his daughter, agitated and perspiring, she recounted the ordeal. "What I didn't find out until maybe 2010 is that my father went up to [the Black Panthers'] office with a gun and told them that he would kill them if they ever bothered me again."

"Processing as a child was a struggle," acknowledges Rhoda. "Years of working things out. We all have our battle scars and wear them differently."

"I did not go out looking for stuff, just like Dr. King did not," McKinney says. "There are certain calls in your life that you cannot reject or ignore. There's a price to pay, but you go on and pay it. You can ask the Lord to give you the strength to make it, and he did. You can see enemies become footstools. You had no

guarantee that that's going to happen, but that's when your faith kicks in."

As best they could, McKinney and his wife Louise tried to bring normalcy to the girls' lives. McKinney called regularly from the road. Louise helped them both understand what they viewed as the great purpose of their father's life.

On the first Sunday in October 1955, Dr. King informed McKinney and several dinner guests that he had accepted his fate—he was on a collision course with destiny and would be assassinated: "In any trip, there's a point of no return," the civil rights leader



McKinney's youngest daughter, Rhoda Eileen. *McKinney family collection*

said. “You go too far. You can’t turn around and go back, unscramble an egg. If you know you’re right, you have cosmic companionship. You’re not alone.”

There was no martyr complex, no looking for death, McKinney says. “But time and history have a way of catching up with you.” By 1968, the death threats again King numbered 50.

On the last day of King’s life, as he stood on a hotel balcony in Memphis, McKinney was on a flight from Philadelphia to Seattle. A front-page photo of King in Memphis caught the preacher’s eye during a stop in Kansas City. “It showed young gangs breaking up the peaceful marches,” he remembers. “And there was a look on his face that troubled me.”

McKinney bought the newspaper and stared at the photograph until he reached Seattle. He remembers an eerie stillness at SeaTac and the greeting from the chairman of the Deacons. “We have to get to the television station,” he told McKinney. “Dr. King was killed.”

The death of Dr. King brought a whirlwind of interviews



She was an educator, a businesswoman, a classics scholar and an art philanthropist. But Louise Jones McKinney was still best known as the longtime wife of McKinney. “There goes my daughter,” her mother said when young Samuel first walked through the door. *McKinney family collection*

for McKinney, who called his friend “an apostle of love.” Days later, 10,000 marched Seattle streets in King’s honor.

In more than 115 years, no one has continuously preached longer at Mount Zion Baptist Church than the Rev. Dr. Samuel McKinney. His achievements—too numerous to list in entirety—include the creation of a federal credit union, an accredited pre-school and kindergarten, an \$850,000 African sanctuary and a 64-unit retirement manor. McKinney has mentored more than 40 ministers, lectured at colleges and seminaries around the nation and preached around the globe.

McKinney sees himself as a leader who simply came along at the right time. “I rose to whatever occasion was necessary. You don’t jump out and say, ‘Hey, I’m your leader. Follow me.’ You’re called to a church.”

“There are many, many people in the world who do good and contribute meaningfully to their communities,” says Lora-Ellen. “But not everyone is at the cusp of history. There is some divinity, some happenstance and some luck, but sometimes people are forced into history—their child goes missing and they have to start a movement. That’s what happened with my father.”

“Daddy changed lives, impacted people and loved us all immensely,” Rhoda says. “He stood for something and created pathways I could follow, show my son and share with others. Were there dark moments? Absolutely. Were there days I wished we did not have to share our parents with people, parishioners and those protesting for a better way? Yes. But I also understood the nature and the necessity of the greater good.”

McKinney is proud to call Seattle home. “We’ve come a long way, but we still have a long way to go,” the preacher says. “Some say we want a colorblind society. We don’t need a colorblind society. In fact, if you’re colorblind, you shouldn’t drive a car. You can’t tell a red light from a green light. But God made us all in different shades and colors and we are all God’s children. And we ought to treat everybody the way we want to be treated.”



McKinney family collection

In the seaport far from everywhere, now a city recognized on the world stage, a stretch of 19th Avenue is named in honor of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Berry McKinney, now an iconic figure. The “conscience of our city” one admirer said. On his walk with God, now 89 years and counting, you’ll still find him fighting for the Social Gospel he was raised to preach. As he pointed out to one crowd, “We’re not in Heaven yet.”

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Washington's Kaleidoscope

21st-Century Washington is rapidly changing. Our diverse state is made up of independent and innovative people who persevere against long odds. Who are we? Where do we come from? Who do we become? Follow the journey of key Washingtonians in a series of online profiles published by Legacy Washington: sos.wa.gov/legacy/who-are-we