

THE REV. DR. SAMUEL B. MCKINNEY



“We’re not in
Heaven yet”

www.sos.wa.gov/legacy

who ARE we? | Washington’s Kaleidoscope

“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.”

Continue reading: www.sos.wa.gov/legacy



In a state of 7 million people, **Who are we?** examines the lives of a diverse cast of standouts who helped make Washington the place it is today. These key leaders—memorable and little-known—fought for civil rights, gave voice to the terminally ill, preserved the environment and rose above dramatic moments in political history. This work is a product of Legacy Washington, an historical project within the Office of Secretary of State.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks in Seattle, November 1961.
Washington State Archives



Rev. Samuel McKinney with Dr. King.
McKinney family collection



June 15, 1963, civil rights protestors in Seattle. Rev. Mance Jackson, center next to Police Sgt. C.R. Connery, also included whites, march at 13th and Pine. *Seattle Post Intelligencer*