



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Moss Kendrix: pioneer, trailblazer, visionary

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Images: Left, Moss Kendrix. Right, A Coca-Cola ad featuring African Americans. Courtesy, Alexandria Black History Museum.

Moss Kendrix revolutionized the advertising industry, paving the way for the diversity of actors and models who today are featured in print ads and billboards, television and radio commercials.

Kendrix realized that African Americans were being overlooked as consumers, although they represented a significant potential market with increasing buying power. In 1948, he founded the Moss H. Kendrix Organization in Washington D.C. with the goal of providing public relations counselors and market consultants to promote the African American customer to American businesses.



The firm handled a variety of clients, such as the Republic of Liberia, the Bahamas Development Board, the Carnation Company, the National Negro Publishers Association, the National Education Association and the Ford Motor Company. However, Kendrix's work with The Coca-Cola Company probably yielded his most visible and enduring legacy.

Positive advertising and sales promotion campaigns showing African Americans as typical, ordinary Americans doing regular activities persuaded African Americans to buy a drink that they were not previously fond of. Seeing African American celebrities enjoying Coca-Cola further enhanced its popularity as did complimentary beverage stations, prizes and contests at national conventions, meetings and sporting events of African American associations and organizations.

With the goal of attracting and supporting African American marketing specialists, providing professional development opportunities and developing strategies for engaging the African American market, Kendrix founded the National Association of Market Developers in 1953.

Kendrix belonged to many organizations and associations, serving on numerous boards and committees. For example, he was a lifetime member of the NAACP, president of the Morehouse College Alumni Association and a member of the National Advisory Board to restore Frederick Douglass's house in D.C.

Kendrix's initial interest in mass communication can be traced to junior high school, where he was involved in virtually every student activity and promotion. His desire to work with people guided his undergraduate days at Morehouse College, where he edited the school newspaper and cofounded the



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Delta Phi Delta Journalism Society, the first journalistic organization for African American students. As a senior, he created National Negro Newspaper Week and a series of radio broadcasts used in yearly celebrations.

Kendrix had an early job in public relations as a public relations officer for the National Youth Administration for Georgia. His appointment as the director of public relations for the Republic of Liberia's Centennial Celebration was likely an impetus for his innovative and groundbreaking profession.

Publishing continued to be an important concern throughout Kendrix's career in public relations as he wrote press releases about the activities of his clients and the organizations with which he was affiliated. Broadcasting and scriptwriting also remained essential interests with his involvement in radio shows, most notably as host of the weekly radio show "Profiles of Our Times" on WWDC.

An archive consisting of 30 cubic feet of documents and more than 900 photographs detailing Kendrix's work and contributions to society is maintained by the Alexandria Black History Museum. Researchers may use the archive by appointment.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.