The Moss Kendrix Collection

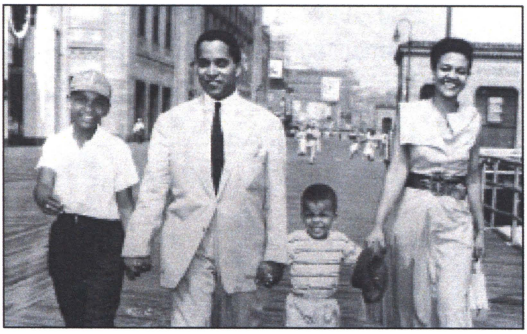
Documents from the life of an
African-American public relations pioneer

The Moss Kendrix Collection is one of several archival collections maintained by the Alexandria Black History Museum. The collection consists of letters, photographs, and advertising ephemera belonging to the late public relations pioneer Moss Kendrix.

As founder and chief executive officer of the Moss Kendrix Organization, Kendrix created advertising campaigns for the African American market for Coca Cola, Ford Motor Company, and other organizations.

The Moss Kendrix Collection was acquired by the Museum in 1990. The archives contain over 900 photographs and 30 cubic feet of documents. Access to the archives is by appointment only. Researchers interested in using archival material should call the curator at (703) 838-4356, two weeks in advance of a scheduled visit.

Copies of photographs may be ordered. The curator can provide details upon request.



The Life of Moss Kendrix

Moss Hyles Kendrix was born in Atlanta, Georgia on March 8, 1917. After education at local public schools, he attended Atlanta's Morehouse College.

At Morehouse, Kendrix was co-founder of Delta Phi Delta Journalism Society, the first society of its kind for African American journalism students. In 1939, Kendrix created National Negro Newspaper Week.

In 1945, Kendrix was director of public relations for the Republic of Liberia's Centennial Celebration. Kendrix's successful work for the Liberian Centennial is believed to have been the inspiration for his future career in public relations. His friendship with Duke Ellington aided him in persuading the composer to create "Liberian Suite" in honor of the republic's 100th anniversary.

In 1944, Moss Kendrix founded "The Moss Kendrix Organization." The company motto was ***What the Public Thinks - Counts!*** Based in Washington, D.C., the organization handled major accounts targeting African American consumers. Clients included Coca Cola Company, Carnation, the National Dental Association, the National Education Association, and Ford Motor Company. Moss Kendrix was also the host of a weekly radio program *"Profiles of Our Times,"* on WWDC for many years.

The Moss Kendrix Organization gradually phased out operations in the 1970s. Moss Kendrix died on December 29, 1989.

The Coca Cola Years

As ubiquitous as Coca Cola is today, in the 1920s and 1930s it was Nehi's beverages that were favored by African Americans in the South.

In the late 1940s Moss Kendrix went to the offices of Coca Cola in Atlanta, Georgia, and was hired after delivering a proposal on how to market to African Americans. This bold action helped Moss Kendrix become the first African American to acquire a major corporate account. Kendrix continued to work for the company until the early 1970s. This panel shows photos from his ad campaigns, including one of celebrities Eddie Fisher and Diahann Carroll (above).

The National Association of Market Developers

The National Association of Market Developers (NAMD) was launched in 1953 at Tennessee State University by Moss Kendrix and others. According to Moss Kendrix, Jr., the association was viewed by his father as a support group for minorities in the public relations field. In 1954, the NAMD was incorporated in the District of Columbia. The National Association of Market Developers is still in operation today, now known as the National Alliance of Market Developers, Inc. There are eleven chapters in the United States.

Moss Kendrix (at far right) at a White House reception with President John F. Kennedy, June 1961.

The Legacy of Moss Kendrix

The imprint Moss Kendrix left on the world of advertising is seen everywhere. Billboards, magazine advertisements, television commercials, and radio ads routinely use African American actors, models, and voice-over artists to sell products. Without the initiative of Moss Kendrix and others in his field, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans would not be represented as fully in print ads, on television, and in the movies.

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