

Commission on Human Rights

KY Human Rights Commission Executive Director statement upon death of Lexington Civil Rights Movement photographer Calvert McCann

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Photographer Calvert McCann, who as a teenager chronicled the civil rights movement in Lexington, Kentucky, during the 1960s, died Sunday, November 23, 2014, at the age of 72.

Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Executive Director John J. Johnson said: "We remember with pride the life and work of Calvert McCann, a Kentucky Son. He carried out an important pioneering achievement in photojournalism. When no one else cared to capture on film local black citizens in the second largest Kentucky city petitioning their government on behalf of civil rights, Mr. McCann was on the job. In this way, his life and work will go on and on forever." The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights expresses its sympathy to Mr. McCann's family and friends.

Mr. McCann loved to take photographs. He said during media interviews that he worked as a teenager in a Lexington film development store where he was a film processor and janitor, and where he was not allowed to work the front counter because the shop preferred to have white employees interact with customers.

Lexington newspaper officials refused to cover with photographs the civil rights sit-ins and peaceful marches calling for an end to segregation. People in Lexington and across the U.S. were forging ahead with the push for black people to have the same basic human rights as others to stay in mainline hotels, eat in the public restaurants of their choice, shop in mainline department stores where people who were white shopped, attend movie theatres and plays and musical performances; and, they pushed for Americans who were black to have the same rights as others to use available bathroom facilities and drinking fountains and not be forced to use separate and most times inferior facilities, if any were provided at all, because of prejudice.

Young McCann became deeply involved in the American Civil Rights Movement, according to media reports. Described by others as quiet and studious, he always carried his camera, taking pictures of the many life-changing events of the era for himself and friends, he later told the Lexington Herald-Leader, which interviewed him in 2004. The paper some time ago apologized for its then two newspapers not reporting on the civil rights movement in Lexington.

The Kentucky Forward (KYforward.com) online news last week after his death said Mr. McCann allowed his photographs to be developed by University of Kentucky Professor Gerald L. Smith years after McCann had shot the film and stored the rolls away in a drawer at his parents' home. Prof. Smith included several of the pictures in a book, *Black America Series: Lexington, Kentucky*.

Afterward, Mr. McCann's photographs were published in the New York Times, on CNN, in the Italian Vogue magazine, "and into history," said Kentucky Forward columnist and Mr. McCann's friend Robert Treadway.

Mr. McCann studied at several colleges including the Kentucky State University, the University of Kentucky, the Tuskegee Institute, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Wisconsin. During the sixties, he also worked as a volunteer for the Peace Corps in Nigeria, the Kentucky Forward said. At the time of his death, he was a retired counselor and social worker of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government.

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government authority that enforces the Kentucky Civil Rights Act and through its partnerships with federal agencies enforces the U.S. Civil Rights Act. These laws make discrimination illegal. For information, contact the commission at 1.800.292.5566.