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New Research Indicates Racial Bias Denied Social Reformer Ada S. McKinley Her Rightful Place in History

Ada S. McKinley Community Services launches initiative to reverse history's omissions and educate public about Chicago humanitarian and "remarkable" racial justice advocate.

(JANUARY 21, 2021; Chicago, Ill.) Newly released scholarly research about Chicago social reformer Ada S. McKinley indicates her contributions to Chicago and to the field of human services have been ignored and marginalized due to her race. The report has spurred the 102-year old nonprofit she founded to call for the rewriting of history books to inform the public of one of the nation's most profoundly successful, yet unheralded human services pioneers.

As we celebrate Black History Month, Ada S. McKinley Community Services CEO Jamal Malone says now is the time for historians, government leaders and the public to help correct what the researchers describe as "white privileged history," and tell the story of the heroine of Chicago's South Side.

In 1919, McKinley founded the South Side Settlement House, which served the largest area in Chicago and was the only settlement house fully staffed by African Americans. In their research, which was recently honored by the Academy of Leisure Sciences, Assistant professor KangJae Lee of North Carolina State University and Professor Rodney B. Dieser of University of Northern Iowa called it "troubling" how historians have cherry-picked historical facts and as a result, marginalized the history of people of color.

McKinley, according to Lee and Dieser, succeeded amidst the era's white establishment and male domination. Facing sexism, racism and segregation, all while being denied the basic democratic right to vote, McKinley struggled financially. Yet passion fueled her work to serve Blacks during the flu pandemic of 1918-1919, the Great Migration from the South, the homecoming of World War I Black veterans lacking health care and services, and the 1919 Chicago race riots.

"We believe race factors into the lack of historical information about McKinley," said Dieser. "As someone who is white, I can say that white historians, whether consciously or unconsciously, wrote a white privileged history that ignored McKinley's contributions, when compared, for example, to social reformer Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House," Dieser added.



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“When you compare the work of Jane Addams on the West Side, to the work of Ada S. McKinley on the South Side, it’s almost identical,” said Malone. “Unfortunately, because of conscious or unconscious bias, her impact has been ignored,” he said.

McKinley’s work for racial equity was also unprecedented, according to Assistant Professor Jerry Lee.

“Her advocacy for racial justice and equity was nothing short of remarkable. She developed the idea of service and volunteerism at a very young age and until the day she died, devoted her life to humanitarian works serving poor and disadvantaged people on the South Side,” Lee added.

Malone is asking scholars and authors to correct history and feature McKinley’s works in books and school curricula. His organization is also calling on Chicagoans to dig through family records, letters, photos and other mementos from the early- to mid-1900s to share with his organization how McKinley’s work transformed lives. Malone is also mobilizing community support to request a major Chicago street be renamed in McKinley’s honor.

“Ada Sophia McKinley died in 1952, so it’s possible those who knew her in the early 20th century may still be with us. In the face of the current pandemic and a significant racial unrest, her work is as relevant and critical today as it was 102 years ago. Help us tell the story of her bravery, which should be reported and honored,” Malone added.

Malone is asking the public to go to <https://www.adasmckinley.org/contact/> and share their information or describe the documents and mementos connecting them to McKinley and Ada S. McKinley Community Services.

To download the scholarly research, “Ada S. McKinley: A Hidden History of African-American Settlement House in Chicago”, please [CLICK HERE](#).

About Ada S. McKinley Community Services

Ada S. McKinley Community Services is one of Chicago’s largest, most respected and impactful Human Services organizations. The nonprofit’s mission is to empower, educate and employ people to change lives and strengthen communities. Serving more than 7,000 people annually, with more than 500 people employed at over 70 program sites in the Chicago metropolitan area, Wisconsin and Indiana, Ada S. McKinley Community Services’ wide-ranging programs fall under the umbrellas of child development and youth, employment and community support, and behavioral health and clinical.

For more information and updates on how the agency continues to meet the needs of people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit www.adasmckinley.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).



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