

Billy Q. McCray served the Wichita community and Kansas for many years, as a member of the Kansas House of Representatives, the Kansas State Senate, and served as the Director of Minority Business, Kansas Department of Commerce. Billy McCray also served at the local level, becoming the first African American Sedgwick County Commissioner. He also served on several boards and commissions locally, and statewide.

The Kansas Historical Society lists this information about Billy Q. McCray.

<https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/billy-mccray/18254>

Billy McCray was born October 29, 1927, near Geary, Oklahoma. He attended Booker T. Washington High School in Dover, Oklahoma, Langston University in Oklahoma, and the University of Colorado. In the late 1940s McCray joined the U.S. Air Force and learned photography. In 1951 he was stationed at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita. After he was discharged from the service he remained in Wichita and worked at Boeing where he eventually became one of the first African-Americans on the photography team. He worked at Boeing for 24 years. In the 1960s McCray became active in the NAACP, speaking out on the need for fair housing regulations. When the 77th district was created in northeast Wichita, he ran for state legislature as a Democrat and won. He served in the House from 1966 until he was elected to the Kansas Senate. He served in the Senate from 1972 to 1984. In 1984 McCray became director of the Office of Minority Business in the Kansas Department of Economic Development. He was elected to the Sedgwick County Commission in 1986 and served until 1993. In addition to politics McCray founded the neighborhood newspaper *Community Voice* as well as McCray and Associates, a consulting firm that helped entrepreneurs land government contracts. McCray died June 2, 2012, in Wichita.

This excerpt from a recently published article, "African American Entrepreneurship in Wichita: Past and Present" appeared in the journal, *Great Plains Quarterly*. Weems, R.E., Jr. (2021).

* Besides a growing national desire to increase opportunities for prospective and established African American entrepreneurs, the late twentieth century saw various states create their own programs to assist nonwhite businesspeople. In Kansas, the Department of Economic Development added a minority business division. Former state senator (from Wichita) Billy Q. McCray, who headed this division in the mid-1980s, appears to have been especially effective in this role. During his tenure, among other things, the number of Black and other nonwhite entrepreneurs gaining procurement contracts from the State of Kansas dramatically increased.¹⁸

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ABSTRACT

African American entrepreneurs have had a long-standing presence in Wichita, Kansas. A major obstacle that Wichita's pioneering Black businesspeople faced was the city's relatively small African American population. Considering how Wichita was a racially segregated city until the 1960s, this demographic reality limited the size of local African American enterprises and their potential consumer market. Nevertheless, the wide variety of smaller Black-owned businesses in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Wichita laid a foundation for later African American business formation when the city's Black population significantly increased. Since the 1960s, African American entrepreneurs in Wichita have expanded into an impressive range of industries. Also, unlike their earlier counterparts, many contemporary Black Wichita entrepreneurs have customers and clients from all races. In addition, a recent survey suggests that contemporary Black business owners in Wichita have higher educational achievement levels than their forebears. Still, some of today's African American entrepreneurs in Wichita (and elsewhere) remain bedeviled by the long-standing obstacle of lack of meaningful access to capital and credit.