

# HENRY MCNEIL "MANDRAKE" BROWN

One Man Who Made A Big Difference



"This is about our children. It is about educating them to the kind of power they have within themselves to control their destinies and their community." Emerge Magazine/1991 - Henry McNeil "Mandrake" Brown Quote

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Henry McNeil "Mandrake" Brown, Jr. was born in Chicago on February 3, 1935, the first born of Marguerite and Henry McNeil Sr.

He received his primary education at Wendell Phillips and A.O. Sexton Elementary Schools. After graduation from Englewood High School in 1953, he attended Wilson Junior College (presently, Kennedy King College).

Henry served in the U.S. Army from January 1955 to January 1958. He played on the little league baseball team and the park district football team. His penchant for athleticism remained intact and even throughout his adult years he participated in winter sports such as skiing. Henry was a member of the Snow-Gophers Ski Club and a member of the Gang Ski Club. He had a reputation for wearing a three piece suit, tie, duster coat and a wide brim hat while skiing down the highest slopes in the world, including the Matterhorn in the Alps.

During his formative years, Henry became very well read and had developed into a charismatic and erudite young man, which are two qualities that paved the way for the dedicated following he had in later years.

His career as a certified court reporter began in 1961. His philosophy was "in order to develop skills in your profession you must be dedicated." To Henry, being victorious meant winning the entire battle, not portions of it.

Mandrake, the name Henry chose to shield his identity, began his now legendary career in 1990 when he started the grass-roots efforts of removing from our communities all alcohol and tobacco related billboards which specifically targeted our children. He distinguished himself by whitewashing billboards that advertised and promoted the sale of alcohol and tobacco to Black and Hispanic children.

Henry wanted children to know that they also have the power to take control of their lives and that adults cared, loved and wanted to protect them from the aggressive marketing of alcohol

and tobacco in their communities. To that end, Mandrake made sure that at every protest rally and march children were present and actively participating in acts of "civil obedience" he vowed to halt the proliferation of advertisements of alcohol and tobacco. He succeeded in:

- Preventing Power Master Malt Liquor in 1991 from being marketed specifically to African-Americans;
- Blocking the marketing and distribution of "Uptown" menthol cigarettes from being coupled with the release of the movie Malcolm X;
- Removing 700 illegal billboards in Chicago by effective utilization of the zoning laws of the City of Chicago;
- Removing the billboards advertising alcohol and tobacco that were located within 500 feet of schools and churches;
- Founding the Citywide Coalition Against Tobacco and Alcohol Billboards (CCATAB), as well as the National Association of African-Americans for Positive Imagery (NAAAPI); and
- Hosting the worldwide No Tobacco Day of 1996 in Chicago, an event which memorialized over 320,000 Blacks who died in this country from tobacco-related diseases.

Mandrake lobbied in Washington, D.C. and in other key cities throughout the country. He spoke at schools, churches and community organizations. Indeed, he was relentless in his efforts to educate Blacks and Hispanics about the tremendous health risk caused by the usage of alcohol and tobacco.

Many people who knew Henry and his unending work in the community were saddened and surprised by this mysterious and untimely death. Henry McNeil "Mandrake" Brown symbolized the type of positive role model that is so vital to our communities. His strong will and dedication to the cause of self determination was unsurmountable.

The Henry McNeil "Mandrake" Brown Park is a commendable tribute to ONE WHO STOOD UP AND MADE A DIFFERENCE.

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"Mandrake was a power house in the community and he did much to improve the quality of life for the community residents. His unyielding and zealous battles against the tobacco and alcohol industries and their use of billboards in our community, and more particularly, around our schools and churches, was tremendously successful."  
Justice R. Eugene Pincham, (retired)

"A struggle against the scourge of alcohol and tobacco has produced a host of unsung sheroes and heros in our community. With limited resources brother Henry "Mandrake" Brown bolstered by is unbounded spirit, raised his voice collectively daring and challenging, ever brave and defiant, Our communities today derive concrete benefits from his efforts to rid our communities of noxious billboards advertising liquid and smoke death."

Kwesi Ronald E. Harris, ATOD Prevention Director

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