

# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

### Prathia Laura Ann Hall

(January 1, 1940 – August 12, 2002)

“Civil Rights Activist – Inspiration for The Term “I Have a Dream”



**Prathia Laura Ann Hall Wynn was born on January 1, 1940** to Reverend Berkeley L. Hall and Ruby Hall. She grew up in Philadelphia, but her family's Southern roots were deep. Her father was a Baptist preacher who founded the Mount Sharon Baptist Church in Philadelphia in 1938. He was a passionate advocate for racial justice and was a great influence on his daughter. Prathia was raised in what she would later describe as "Freedom Faith," the belief that she was God's child and was therefore loved and important. Prathia had her first encounter with racism at the age five when she took a train from Philadelphia to Virginia to visit her grandparents. As the train traveled south, Prathia and her sister, Teresa, and her mother were forced to be reseated in a segregated car when the train crossed the Mason-Dixon line (the Pennsylvania-Maryland border). Prathia recalled the incident as her first encounter with the dehumanizing effects of racism. By age 15, Prathia expressed interest in joining the Civil Rights Movement.

Prathia graduated from Philadelphia High School for Girls in 1958. After graduation she enrolled in Temple University and graduated from that institution in 1962 with a BA in Political Science. After graduation, Prathia joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and became the first woman field organizer for SNCC in Southwest Georgia which included Terrell County, Georgia. Terrell County was nicknamed "Terrible Terrell" because of the violence that civil rights activists faced in the county. On August 14th of that year, the Shady Grove Baptist Church in Leesburg, Ga., was burned after it and other churches in the state served as a base for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, whose goal was to bring equality to the South. On September 6, of the same year, white segregationists' nightriders fired into the house where Prathia was staying with two other civil rights activists, Jack Chatfield and Christopher Allen. All three suffered injuries from the attack. Just three days later on September 9, 1962, two southwest Georgia churches, Mount Olive Baptist Church near Sasser, and Mount Mary Baptist Church near Chickasawatchee, were burned by the Ku Klux Klan. The next day, a community prayer vigil took place where Mount Olive Baptist Church once stood.



Shady Grove Baptist Church



**SEMI RELEASE**  
STUDENT NON-VIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
1000 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, N.W.  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA  
January 23, 1964

**DEBRA DEBERRY TO JUDGE**  
ATLANTA (SNC) READ (SNC)

ATLANTA, Ga. ... The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee has announced the appointment of a SNCC "Minister of Atlanta Activities" and the arrival of comedian Dick Gregory here Saturday, January 23.

Gregory ... who had received threats from segregationists here -- will arrive in Atlanta Saturday to "help conduct further protests," according to SNCC spokesman.

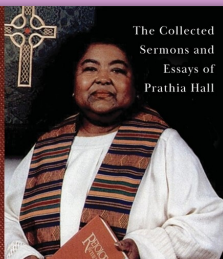
Miss Prathia Hall, 24, from Philadelphia, Pa., will direct SNCC efforts in Atlanta. Miss Hall has worked for SNCC for over a year, and has been active in voter registration work and direct action in Albany, Ga., and surrounding counties, Texas, Ala., and Mississippi, Miss.

She is a 1962 graduate of Temple University and studied political science and religion.

For further information, call:  
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee  
1000 University Ave., N.W.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

The service was attended by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and James Bevel. Prathia, drawing on her Baptist roots, led the group in an impassioned prayer repeating the phrase, "I Have A Dream." According to Bevel, Prathia's "I have a Dream" phrase inspired Reverend King to start using it in his sermons. Prathia later acknowledged that Reverend King asked her permission to use the phrase in his sermons leading up to his famous "I Have a Dream Speech" at the March on Washington one year later.

In 1978, Hall began serving as pastor at Mt. Sharon Baptist Church in Philadelphia which her father founded forty years earlier. Prathia later moved to Roosevelt, New York with her husband, Ralph Wynn, whom she married sometime in the mid-1960's. She earned a Master of Divinity in 1982, Master of Theology in 1984, and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1997. In 2000, she joined the faculty at Boston University School of Theology where she held the Martin Luther King Chair in Social Ethics. In 1997, Ebony magazine named Hall number one on their list of Top 15 Greatest Black Women Preachers. Rev. Prathia Hall Wynn died of cancer on August 12, 2002 in Boston, Massachusetts at the age of 62.



The Collected Sermons and Essays of Prathia Hall

**Beyond Eden**

EDITED BY COURTNEY PACE

