

Linda Gayle Waters Richardson

November 21, 1946-November 2, 2020



Linda Richardson was born in Philadelphia, PA to the late Lester and Bertha Waters. She received her formal education in the Philadelphia Public School system and was a proud graduate of Overbrook High School. She was a devoted community builder, daughter, older sister, wife, mother and grandmother. She married the late Donald Richardson, in 1965, and from that union had Aissia Richardson and Tarik Richardson. In 1982 she then married the late Yahya Abdul Karim and they became the power couple on Avenue of the Arts-North Broad Street in the 1990's most known for their work with the Black United Fund, Uptown Theater, Garvey-Wells Bookstore and actively participated in Temple University's Pan-African Studies Community Education Program (PASCEP) . They had two biological children together, Monifa Young and Mariama Wood and also served in parental roles to Keshia Jones and Gerald Covert.

Passionate about the arts, she worked her first job long enough to save money to get an Associate's degree from the Philadelphia Dance Academy in 1967 where she majored in Dance and Theater. After working in and teaching theater/dance for the Philadelphia Recreation Department and School District of Philadelphia for many years, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is what propelled her to a life of activism and community building. She was rehearsing for a play with the integrated Theater 14 at Heritage House in North Philadelphia when the actors heard commotion outside: a community enraged, feeling hopeless and discussing economic oppression and racial disparity. She spoke to them about art, hope and vision but felt her cultural work was irrelevant. It was then she decided to give up dancing and acting to do community organizing for the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice and, later, Triple Jeopardy. Additionally, she was a performer, fundraiser and wardrobe designer for a North Philadelphia theater arts group called, The Black Butterfly.

From 1972 to 1979 she was hired as co-director of the People's Fund, the precursor of Bread and Roses Community Fund, a progressive social change foundation. She also co-directed the Philadelphia Clearinghouse of Community Funding Resources, an entity providing technical assistance and operational support to emerging social change organizations.

In 1982, she established the Black United Fund (BUF) of Pennsylvania after minority-run organizations and black social workers expressed concern that safety-net programs were cut drastically by the Reagan Administration and not receiving technical assistance and fiduciary support from larger entities. As founder and Executive Director for the Black United Fund, Linda Richardson managed a \$2 million construction project resulting in the first Avenue of the Arts-North completed project, and developed a fundraising federation resulting in \$300,000.00 in annual income. While running BUF, she simultaneously completed her Bachelor's and Master's in Science from New Hampshire University in 1990.

In 1995, the economic-development committee of BUF incorporated the Uptown Entertainment Development Corporation and gained the title of the historic Uptown Theater in 2004. Linda blended her passion for the arts with community development and served as the founding President of the Uptown Entertainment & Development Corporation (UEDC) until her untimely death. There she launched a Capital Campaign for \$8 million, raised \$5 million, and provided oversight to the construction project of the theater. She started the Uptown Radio station WJYN 98.5 FM, a low frequency station serving North Philadelphia and Center City. She created an award-winning STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) youth program, harvesting the creative energy of North Philadelphia Youth. She also created a young adult leadership training program to ensure the active engagement she experienced continues to spur civic responsibility in generations to come. Her role in revitalizing the Uptown Theater and harnessing the creative, commercial and civic talent in North Philadelphia is critical in keeping Philadelphia a Mecca for art, culture and business engagement.

She was devoted to her family and was extremely proud to have ongoing, collaborative projects in the arts, education, community revitalization and healthcare reform with her 6 siblings. She leaves a legacy behind and many to cherish her memory including her siblings: Cynthia Waters-Tines (Mark), Dr. Sheila Waters, Jack Waters (Peter), Vincent Waters (Renee), Dr. Diana Waters, and Nica Waters-Fleming (Rob); her children: Aissia Richardson, Tarik Richardson, Gerald Covert (Cindy), Keshia Jones, Monifa Young (Zachary), and Mariama Wood (Derrick); grandchildren: Emanuel, Hakeem, Yasmina, Bryanna, Jaylin, Naima, Daeja, Tre, Naiya, Alana, Demari and Yasin; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and community organizations where she served on the Board of Directors: African American Museum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Folklore Project, Anti-racism committee of the Philadelphia Ethical Humanist Society; and American Ethical Union.