

In Memoriam: Sister Makinya Sibeko-Kouate



Sister Makinya Sibeko-Kouate popularize the holiday of Kwanzaa in northern California (Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco, East Palo Alto), and around the world as she traveled to thirty-six states in the U.S., Europe, Mexico, and to thirteen African nations sharing her knowledge about the holiday (inspired by Maulana Karenga) which began or her in 1967 with the encouragement of Fred T. Smith when she created and organized a seven-day in celebration of the ‘first fruits of the harvest’ in southwest Berkeley, California. She joined the ancestors February 4, 2017 at the age of 90. She was a dynamic person (leader, teacher, mentor), she taught piano at age 13, she performed with a 24 Grand Piano Ensemble for the 1939-1940 World’s Fair at Treasure Island (an artificial island in San Francisco Bay, located between San Francisco and Oakland

connected by an isthmus to Yerba Buena Island, which is a natural island) , at 16 having studied aerodynamics, she enlisted in WWII, “bringing airplanes in on a beam”, thus, she one of the first air traffic controllers stationed in Alameda, California. Married in 1946 at 19, she and her husband were avid golfers. In the 1950s, under the tutelage of Barney Hillburn, first Black director of HUD, she became the first woman manager of a 527-unit housing project. She was a social reporter for California Voice, the oldest Black newspaper in California. In 1965, she attended Merritt College, studying business administration and real estate. As the first Black student body President in the Peralta Community College District, she help to developed the first Black Studies Department in 1966, and the first Black Student Union in the U.S. at Merritt College in Oakland. She was part of the first generation of students to receive a B.A. in Black Studies at California State University, East Bay (then California State University, Hayward), and later, she received a California teaching credential via the same institution. As an educator, she taught students in every grade from nursery school to post-graduate from 1985-2005, and from 1985-1995, she hosted an interview program on the listener sponsored radio station KPFA 94.1 FM, called “Face the Day.” She was interviewed for *Kwanzaa: Black Power and the Making of the African-American Holiday Tradition* (Routledge, 2009) as an expert on Kwanzaa (pp.107-112, 132, 233). In 2011 she was honored by the Kemet Foundation “African Community Honors” benefit for the Afrikan Children’s Advanced Learning Center (Oakland, California) with the Fannie Lou Hamer Forthrightness Award. A lover of the arts, from 1998-2016 she danced for the ancestors with the International Japanese Buddhist Obon Odari Festivals of Joy in twelve cities in California (as demonstrated in the above photo). As chairwoman of the YWCA Western States, in 2015 she attended the national convention on its 100th anniversary.