

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vernell Lillie

PERSON

Lillie, Vernell A. (Vernell Audrey), 1931-

Alternative Names: Vernell Lillie; Vernell Lillie

Life Dates: May 11, 1931-May 11, 2020

Place of Birth: Hempstead, Texas, USA

Residence: Pittsburgh, PA

Work: Pittsburgh,, PA

Occupations: Theatrical Instructor

Biographical Note

Founder and artistic director of Kuntu Repertory Theatre, Vernell Audrey Watson Lillie was born on May 11, 1931, in Hempstead, Texas. Lillie attended Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she earned her B.A. degree in speech and drama. In 1958, she completed a six year graduate study at Texas Southern University. She earned her M.A. degree in English from Carnegie Mellon University in 1971, and her D.A. degree in English from Carnegie Mellon University the following year.

In 1974, Lillie established the Kuntu Repertory Theatre with the intent to examine Black life from a sociopolitical-historical perspective. Lillie used drama to educate while entertaining. The theatre naturally developed into a supportive community for black writers, actors and artists. Since its establishment, the theatre has sponsored countless activities which highlight the African American community. Lillie has directed many productions including: The Buffalo Soldiers Plus One, Little Willie Armstrong Jones and Whispers Want to Holler.

Lillie has been the recipient of many prestigious awards including the University of Pittsburgh Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award; the Outstanding Award for Women in the Arts by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; and the 2003 Career Achievement in Education Award from the Association for Theatre in Higher Education.

Lillie passed away on May 11, 2020.

Related Entries

Phillis Wheatley High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Crawford Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Dillard University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Kuntu Repertory Theatre [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Founder

Julia C. Hester House [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1952 to 1956]

Teacher

Phillis Wheatley High School [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1956 to 1969]

Teacher

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member

National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA) [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member