



Akua Budu-Watkins

A native Detroit, Akua Budu-Watkins is dedicated to the advocacy of social justice, human rights and women's empowerment. For nearly 50 years she has been committed to the struggle for economic equity and equality. Her early experiences as a child growing up in the pre-Civil Rights era prepared her spiritually and mentally to begin a life of struggle for the liberation of Black people. She is well-known, both nationally and internationally, as a political strategist and human rights activist and has journeyed to Europe, South America, the Caribbean and Africa to address issues of justice and equity. The fire initially came from her father, El Shabazz Abdullah, a General Motors Corporation worker originally from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, who regularly took her with him to the temple that preceded the mosque that still stands on Linwood. But her nuclear family planted seeds of nationalism in her at an early age. As a child, she memorized the names of African countries at her father's direction, and her uncle, Robert Louis Jordan, joined the Freedom Riders organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the early 1960s. She participated in several civil rights marches in Detroit, including the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. March in 1963 where the famous "I Have a Dream" speech was introduced.

By the late 1960s, she was active in the Pan African movement while organizing block clubs and landlord-tenant unions locally. However, by the mid-70s, Akua had been married, divorced and had four daughters to raise; therefore, she decided she needed a spiritual home and started attending lectures and programs at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. In 1975, she formally joined the Shrine at which time she also graduated from Wayne County Community College where she accepted a position in the Student Services division. Akua became involved with the National Black Women's Health Project (Imperative) in the 1980s. This gave her a keen awareness of the challenges faced by women of color attempting to balance the demands of child rearing and their own personal development; consequently, she founded *Sister Spirit* retreats to provide women of color with a spiritual and emotional outlet. She founded *Sisternomics*, a seminar that focused on women's financial literacy and health maintenance. She remained at Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD) nearly twenty years serving in several positions, including Coordinator of Student Activities for the five WCCCD campuses, while also attending Spring Arbor College in their Management and Organizational Development program. She became the state coordinator for the Free South Africa Movement organizing throughout the State of Michigan. In fact, she was the Mistress of Ceremony at the Nelson and Winnie Mandela Rally at Tiger Stadium in 1990. She was also an early member of the National Black Feminist Organization. Her advocacy motivated her to become an outstanding community organizer, which compelled her to get involved in politics. While active in Trans Africa, a Washington-based group that is the African American Lobby for Africa and the Caribbean, she included the Shrine by bringing in speakers, providing workshops, and organizing public demonstrations against apartheid in South Africa. She was recognized and received an award from the South African government for her contribution in the struggle against apartheid in 2006. In fact, throughout her tenure in the church she always made sure she was inclusive with respect to participation in all of her community work. A natural organizer, Sis. Akua earned the title of Field General when she organized over 6,000 volunteers and directed ten offices for former Mayor Dennis Archer's first campaign. During his first term he appointed her Director of Neighborhood City Halls, and during his second term promoted her to Executive Assistant focusing on public utilities. U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow selected her to coordinate the Detroit community outreach plan for her election campaign and she was appointed Director of the Southeast Michigan office. Akua's knowledge, resourcefulness and commitment have given her the opportunity to serve on many national and local boards, including the Michigan Medical Holistic Association Leadership Team, Community in Schools, and the Michigan Welfare Rights Association.

Akua Budu-Watkins has a broad range of expertise as a political strategist and management consultant. She is in the church's Social Outreach Group where she is Events Coordinator. She is the Founder of Creative Resource Solutions, a management, political consulting and strategic planning firm dealing in community organizing, organizational development and project management. She continues to be dedicated and asserts that her physical, spiritual and political awareness are the keys to her empowerment. Akua is married to Lt. Kangwana Karega Kefing (John A. Watkins, Jr.) and together they are the parents of seven children and nine grandchildren.