



City University Of New York

August 14, 2022

**Via Email**

Cooperative Hall of Fame  
c/o Cooperative Development Fund  
Washington, DC 2000

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To The Hall of Fame Induction Committee:

It is my pleasure to recommend Linda Leaks for induction into the Cooperative Hall of Fame. Linda Leaks is a co-op hero. Her persistence, sacrifice and dedication to the co-op movement are particularly evident in her 35 years of organizing housing cooperatives and the at least 15 apartment buildings in Washington, DC, that she helped to convert to co-ops. I first learned of Linda Leaks' role in helping to found the Ella Jo Baker Intentional Community Cooperative (EJBICC) around 2006. I interviewed her in 2007 for my book, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. Her description of the need for a housing co-op like the EJBICC, and the organizing challenges and successes when organizing the EJBICC was riveting and inspiring. I was particularly struck by Linda's comment about finding study circles helpful in her work organizing EJBICC and in organizing housing cooperatives in the 1980s and 1990s. I had already been finding in my research on the history of Black cooperatives how important study groups were to starting Black co-ops. And here was a more contemporary example of the continuing significance of study circles. In addition, by that time I had begun to understand how important the role of Black women was to the Black American co-op movement as well as the US co-op movement in general. Here was a contemporary example of the energy, persistence, organizing skills, and vision of a Black woman cooperator and co-op developer, Linda Leaks. So I included her in my book. At that time I didn't realize how many housing co-ops she had organized in Washington DC.

I continued to be inspired by Linda, a few years later, when I worked with her when we were volunteers with the nonprofit Organizing Neighborhood Equity DC (ONE DC), helping tenants to organize, and to learn about and establish housing co-ops, and in general to attempt to slow down gentrification and support low-income long term residents of DC. And as I have met and talked with Linda socially throughout the years, and discussed her work and the history of the Black cooperative movement in general, I understand more and more how relentless she has been in her belief in co-ops and in her organizing housing cooperatives. I honestly believe that DC would not have as many housing co-ops as it does if it weren't for Linda Leaks. Her contributions to DC's housing co-ops and the housing co-op movement are impressive – and immeasurable.



Earlier this year, during the process of researching Ella Jo Baker as a submission for the Unsung Hero's project for the Co-op Hall of Fame, Ajowa Ifateyo, who lives in EJBICC had insight that Linda Leaks, who she has known for 40 years, definitively fits the qualifications of a cooperative hero. She had heard Linda tell stories about her housing cooperative organizing days including that she had set up she thought about 19 housing cooperatives. Ajowa was adamant that she wanted to work on a submission for Linda so soon after the Baker submission as possible. Ajowa said that even she had not realized until recently the extent of the work that Linda had done with cooperative housing in the District, including developing educational games and materials to teach public housing residents not only about how to run a cooperative, but to understand the whole process of development. Here is another place where Linda shines – educating people about the co-op model, and translating information so everyone and anyone can learn how to run a co-op. Those of us in the co-op world understand how important this is – to have accessible and effective learning materials so that we can sustain our co-ops. Ajowa, for example, is excited about finding “new” educational material developed for other housing cooperatives that can be used for EJBICC, and other housing cooperatives nationally. This certainly adds a new and exciting find for the housing cooperative movement in general.

In addition, Linda's vision was much broader than housing cooperatives: she tried unsuccessfully to organize a management company for limited equity cooperatives, and had plans for organizing other cooperative business such as janitorial services for housing cooperatives, and those that could provide jobs for residents of DC housing cooperatives that never got off the ground for various reasons.

Linda Leaks is a modest woman who is more focused on helping people than on receiving acknowledgement of or bragging about her work. Ajowa has confirmed through talking with former staff members at WISH that Linda developed about 17 housing cooperatives (she believes there are more but couldn't find agreement or confirmation). Moreover, Linda has provided cooperative education for about 30 housing cooperatives in general, especially while she was the Washington Inner City Self Help's (WISH) staff “cooperative educator.” But you never hear that from Linda. She didn't shine the light on herself, she just did the work. Linda spent her career in organizing jobs that paid less than \$35,000 per year, and in volunteering her time to advocate for housing justice and organize co-ops. That level of sacrifice and dedication is rare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The work that Linda Leaks did organizing housing cooperatives during a time of early gentrification in DC, as well as spending a month in 1992 in Johannesburg South Africa, helping residents to organize the first housing cooperatives, called the Seven Buildings Project, indicates the local as well as national importance of Linda's work, and her commitment to cooperatives that spans over 35 years. In addition, her educational documents substantially add to the body of cooperative education materials available free to the public.

Linda Leaks is a very serious, dedicated and selfless person and cooperator, who exemplifies conviction, fortitude, determination and focus, as well as innovation and vision. She has maintained a strong and long term/sustained commitment to housing justice through organizing and maintaining housing cooperatives, especially limited equity housing co-ops. In addition,

throughout her career she shows a 35 year commitment to the cooperative movement in general – especially as a co-op educator and advocate. Linda is a housing co-op developer, and co-op educator - and a co-op visionary. She deserves the highest recognition that the co-op movement bestows. It is only fitting that her exceptional, difficult, and consistent co-op work be recognized, and added to those who will be remembered for their substantial contributions to the cooperative movement. For these reasons, I support Linda’s induction into the Cooperative Hall of Fame.

In Cooperation,



Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, Ph.D.

*2016 Inductee into the Co-op Hall of Fame*

*Affiliate scholar, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan (Canada)*

*Faculty Fellow and Mentor with the Institute for the Study of Employee Ownership and Profit*

*Sharing at Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations*

*Member of the Cooperative Economics Council (formerly the Council of Cooperative*

*Economists) of the National Cooperative Business Association/CLUSA*

*Member of the International Co-operative Alliance Committee on Co-operative Research.*

*Author of *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* (2014).*

*Co-Founder of the Eastern Conference for Workplace Democracy, The US Solidarity Economy Network, and the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives.*