

In Memoriam

Roderick Douglas Bush

November 12, 1945 to December 5, 2013

CCLP mourns the passing of Roderick Bush, long-time CCLP supporter and fighter for the rights of working people.

Born in Sanford, Florida, weighing a single pound, Rod began his life as a fighter for survival with the love and support of his family. In 1959, his family moved to Rochester, NY, where in 1963 he graduated from Madison High School. He obtained a Bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1967, completed his coursework for a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at the University of Kansas in 1972, and obtained his Ph.D. in Sociology from Binghamton University in 1992.



Ties With Working Class Communities

Through Dr. Bush's work as a psychologist and urban planning analyst in black and working class communities of Kansas City, he became a member of a number of organizations calling for social justice, equality for African Americans and African Liberation.

In 1979, he moved to the San Francisco Bay area to engage in community organizing, working on projects such as the Grassroots Alliance (initiatives to tax corporations), Full Employment Project of Oakland, US Out of Central America (USOCA), US Out of South Africa (USOSA), and the Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis.

In 1985, Dr. Bush returned east and worked at New York City Technical College Rikers' Island Project, Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center and Seton Hall University. Within the last decade, Dr. Bush joined the national council of the Black Radical Congress and the Executive Board of the Left Forum.

Connecting his Actions with CCLP

Joining the faculty of St. John's University in 1997, Dr. Bush not only lectured on race, gender, social change and inequality, but also encouraged his students to take action. Dr. Bush was introduced to the Coalition of Concerned Legal Professionals in 2007 by a student, then-president of Alpha Kappa Delta, the International Sociology Honors Society. For the next

six years, Dr. Bush welcomed CCLP volunteers into all of his classes every semester to speak about the state of the legal system, CCLP's strategy to fight for meaningful access to the courts — particularly for low-income, minority and other working people; and most importantly, how his students could learn to be leadership to make a difference. He also introduced many of his colleagues at St. John's, so that they, too, could host CCLP speakers.

Dr. Bush provided an inspiring introduction to CCLP every time volunteers spoke in his class, encouraging students to get involved. "With his characteristic big smile and twinkle in his eye he would ask leading questions to CCLP speakers, to make sure his students were thinking and understanding the presentation," recounted CCLP Operations Manager Susan Prensky. "A couple of times when our volunteers spoke in his class describing gentrification driving out poor and working people from areas of New York City, Professor Bush interjected a story that clearly influenced his life's work. He said that he had lived in Rochester, NY and during the 1960's left to go to college at Howard University. When he returned and found his former high school buddies engaged in less than positive activities, he challenged them. He recalled one saying, 'Oh, yeah, you can talk, college boy, but what's here for us?' In his teaching, organizing, political work and in opening his classroom to CCLP volunteers, Professor Bush struggled to address and resolve that question."

Many of his students followed his advice and came to CCLP to learn firsthand about the problems in the legal system and what they could do about them. "Dr. Bush encouraged me to do more and help set the stage for an authentic social change in our American dilemma through CCLP," commented volunteer Chabelly Aimi Acosta, who met CCLP in Dr. Bush's sociology class. "As a CCLP volunteer, I have helped struggle against the inequalities towards minorities and low-income workers produced by our legal system."

"The world has lost an impassioned fighter for the rights of all people," said Jarvis Rucker, another

of his students who volunteered with CCLP. “Rod Bush was a trailblazer who believed that everyone, regardless of race or gender, has the potential to lead the people toward constructive social, economic, and political change. He understood and emphasized the importance of youth in the struggle for a just and democratic world.”

CCLP volunteers spoke in Professor Bush’s class on November 7, 2013, the day before his diagnosis of bile duct cancer. “Since he was not in class that day due to his health,” explained Prensky, “I called him at home to let him know how it went and to find out how he was doing. I told him about our presentation, which included a visiting dignitary, Cesar Rochez Reyes, Esq., Cultural Ambassador to the UN from Honduras, who spoke about his fight against the charter cities in Honduras. I thanked him for opening his classroom to us. He said, ‘You have been a great influence on our students.’ He added that he ‘plans to still be there.’”

And he is, in the many generations of students, professors, family and friends he influenced. As Rod’s wife, soulmate, colleague and friend,

Melanie Bush recalled, “He had a profound belief in humanity and a better future; he saw possibility in everyone, understood that making a difference can be something we do every minute of every day. We can all draw upon his example of generosity, caring for and believing in each other and do better ourselves.” Melanie has reached out to CCLP as one of many ways to continue her husband’s legacy and their shared work placing primacy on involving young people in making a difference.

In addition to his wife Melanie Bush, he leaves behind their daughter Sarafina F. Bush; son and daughter Malik Bush and Thembi Bush Tillman, granddaughter Tajalia, four grandsons Angelo, Orlando, Jedidiah and Wisdom, God-daughter Isabella and her parents Andree Tenemas Chavez and James Chavez, his mother-in-law “Rozzie,” son-in-law Jamal Tillman, daughter-in-law Donna Bush and a multitude of cousins, friends and family from many different communities and networks. He was preceded in death by his daughter Sojourner Truth Bush.