

## Program

**Rod's life began** in Sanford, Florida, weighing only one pound. He often told the story that the hospital encouraged his mother to go home as there was no way he was going to live. She refused to accept that and said she was going to take her baby and love-love-love him. And so right from the start, Rod not only beat the odds, but was surrounded by generous love, family and a caring community. During his early childhood, he lived in the Oviedo and Snowhill area of Florida. Many of his closest longtime friendships were made during these years, as well as his deep connections to the Bush, Craddock, Muller and Mobley families. He often stayed with his grandma "Barkoo" Arbesto Johnson and "Aunt Honey" Margie Whipper especially after his mother moved to Rochester, NY. Rod joined her there in 1959.

**He was a proud** 1963 graduate of Madison High School in Rochester, where he excelled in math and science, and was president of the school's chapter of the National Honor Society. He ranked third in his senior class, above all but one of the 90 or so white students in the class of 150. He went on to obtain a Bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1967 where he studied with extraordinary scholars such as Toni Morrison and Sterling Brown. In 1972, he completed coursework for a PhD in Clinical Psychology at the University of Kansas.

**In Kansas City**, Rod worked as a psychologist and an urban planning analyst in Black and working class communities. His developing political commitment led him to become involved as a member of the Congress of African People (CAP), the Student Organization for Black Unity, the Youth Organization for Black Unity (SOBU/YOBU), the Revolutionary Workers League (M-L), and the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC). In 1979, Rod moved to the San Francisco Bay area to devote himself full time to community organizing and political engagement. He worked on projects such as the Grassroots Alliance initiatives to tax the corporations, Full Employment Project of Oakland, USOCA: US Out of Central America, USOSA: US Out of South Africa and the Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis. It was during this time that he met Melanie and their life journeys were joined.

**In 1985**, they relocated to New York, to Flatbush, Brooklyn. Rod worked at the New York City Technical College Rikers' Island Project, and the Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center, while commuting to Binghamton University to complete his PhD in Sociology in 1992. They made regular trips to Rochester during this time to visit with his mother, and attend Memorial AME Zion Church with her.

**In 1993**, Rod began teaching at Seton Hall University and in 1997 moved to St. John's University where he was made a Full Professor of Sociology last year. Hundreds of students studied under his guidance and were mentored as undergraduates; hundreds completed their Master's and dozens moved on to complete their PhD degrees. Throughout this time, Rod earned many awards for his scholarship, teaching and service.

**In the last decade**, Rod was a member of the national council of the Black Radical Congress and more recently of the Executive Board of the Left Forum. In these capacities, he built bridges between the Black Left and Black Nationalist communities and with progressive and radical movements at large. As such, Rod became part of an extensive network of scholars involved in a project related to Transnational Africa and another related to the World and U.S. Social Forum movements. His work on race/white supremacy, democracy and globalization brought him to places such as France, Nigeria and Brazil to study with scholars and activists concerned about these issues and their real time impact on ordinary people around the globe. He proudly, defiantly, compassionately, generously, and wisely provides a model for us to draw upon as we move forward his legacy of belief in possibility, profound love for community and humanity and a rich and deep intellectual tradition dedicated to the common good.

### Opening Prayer

Rev. Brian L. Carter, Chaplain, Mt. Sinai Hospital

### Introduction

**Dawn Esposito**, PhD Chair, Assoc. Prof., Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology

### Voices of Victory

Director, Nigel W. Gretton

"Be Grateful"

"To Dream the Impossible Dream"

**William DiFazio**, PhD Professor, Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology

### Sinai's Radiant Liturgical Dance Ministry

Dance Ensemble

Music: "More Than I Can Bear" by Kirk Franklin

### Video:

"Remembering Dr. Bush"

Students featured: Christina Sneed, Anyesha Battle, Pablo Sanchez,

Colleen Fonseca, Glynis Johns, and Donya Nasser

## Musical Interlude

**Reflections**, Open to Attendees

**Natalie Byfield**, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology

**Step-Ya-Game Up** - President, Anscia Brown

**Remarks**, Dr. Melanie Bush & Family

### Musical Tribute

Soloist: Colleen Fonseca

Song: "I Know Where I've Been," by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman

**Closing Prayer** - Rev. Brian L. Carter



**Master of Ceremonies**, Roberta Villalon, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology

**Director**, Jesse Adamo Grimes, MA

Division of Student Affairs

Administrative Director and Project Manager