

Melanie E. L. Bush

Closing

In the remarks I shared at the Rod Bush Memorial held in June 2014 at the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church in Brooklyn, I opened by calling Rod to our sacred space. “Babe, are you here? Are you present?” I told him that this was a Celebrations-Thanks-Remembrance gathering like the ones we used to host. I asked, “Babe, do you see who’s present? Do you feel the awe you’ve inspired, do you feel the love of all these wonderful people, for you?” and awaited his response. “What’s that? Oh okay, I’ll ask them. You want to know if they feel your love, too? By now, babe, I think they do. But if they’ve forgotten, let us together remind them of just how much you cherish them. For that’s just why we brought them here. *You and I can talk anytime.*”

And so in closing this book I shall do the same. The writings in this anthology contain, in so many different formulations, the great lessons that Rod Bush offers us about how to live a life grounded in love, justice, and liberation. That is, most especially to embrace and embody an understanding of the power that resides within you, and your particular superpowers; to employ them as often, as intentionally, and as vigorously as you can in the many opportunities that you face

every single day to make a difference. For, with the spirit and the power of the people we can and shall overcome.

Rod believed in you, just as he believed in the all-encompassing *us*. Rod deeply believed in community and the transformative power of love. Our children were the bedrock upon which everything he did was built and the true inspiration for his commitment to justice. Our grandchildren provided for him the answer to the question of *why* keep believing when so much around us seems dark. Rod was never happier than when he was with them.

So many family members, students and friends provided Rod the sustenance, courage and strength to shape his determination that nothing stops until freedom is achieved. Your intellectual depth, personal character, unwavering dedication to the pursuit of knowledge, and passion for justice provided him with deep hope for our tomorrows. It was ordinary people who inspired and grounded Rod through meaningful conversations, extraordinary adventures, struggles and celebrations and you (they) meant the world to him.

To Rod, each of you really matters. His love is without limits, boundaries, borders, or timestamps.

In closing, I suggest several final reflections on a life well-lived in this exploration of lessons on liberation, love, and justice from a radical Black scholar.

Rod's loving soul and very being provide insights for a response to Grace Boggs, who was known for asking the questions: What does it mean to be human in the 21st century? Who will we choose to be in a world not of our choosing? She said, "You don't choose the times you live in, but you do choose who you want to be, and you do choose how you want to think." "The time has come to grow our souls."¹ Rod embodied these principles in his writing, his teaching and mentorship, and in the ways he interacted on a daily basis.

When I started to think about how to sustain the engagement of Rod's life work, the following principles came to mind as those that most clearly describe his praxis. You will find each of these

1. See <http://boggscenter.org/category/grace-lee-boggs/> for information about the writing and ideas of Grace Lee Boggs.

articulated many times in the chapters throughout this anthology. These are guideposts for all of us as a way to live consciously, for love and liberation:

- Community, collaboration, collectivity, inclusivity, relationships, and teamwork
- Impact, engagement, and making a difference both in process and outcome
- Synergy, complexity, interconnectedness, dialectics
- Integrity, principle, humility, wisdom, dignity
- Love of and commitment to humanity and all beings.

These principles translate in a few final themes and lessons that form these concluding reflections:

(1) Really try to do our very best whether it is or isn't "enough"

This entire volume is predicated on a belief that Rod Bush was an extraordinary human being. If you are convinced of this, too, then remember that he believed that you, too, are also extraordinary. His soul resided in a profound belief in the power of the people—individually and collectively—and that we must never surrender to anything less than victory.

If we only see how smart or loving he was, and view him as an exception to the rule, then we miss his point. Of course, he was special—but he was especially special in his belief in us. We might see him as a superhero, but need to recognize he saw each of us that way, too.

That means reaching deep within, setting and maintaining high expectations of ourselves and each other. It means recognizing that what we do (or do not do) affects those around us—both immediately and more broadly. It means not surrendering to the pressures of these miserable times. And they are most certainly increasingly difficult.

We all have superpowers—let us recognize and cultivate them in ourselves and each other. Are we each doing our best to bring our superpowers to light? What might we do differently that will allow them to be more present? For humanity, for community, for liberation, and for each other and ourselves. What can we do to help each other

grow and use our specific powers?

(2) Be good listeners and situated in humility, in dialogue

Rod profoundly believed that we can learn from each other, especially across experiences and perspective. Someone noted how well he could hold his ground, while still listening. Can't we all do that? With humility and respect, ever pursuing a deeper understanding? Maybe not the way he did it, but in our own ways, for we need as many of us as possible to face the enormous challenges of our times. We can make allies through dialogue, and we must begin by listening and understanding. We need each other—always, not just when we agree or we do the “right” thing.

(3) Be present and enjoy laughter

Even as a deep thinker so often immersed in profound questions, Rod Bush was centered in the moment, and in finding the sweetness of our imperfections and the silly and corny in the everyday of life. How might we each do better at embodying those qualities?

There are so many lessons of this life well-lived. Rod Bush truly did believe that love and justice will triumph, as a logical and imperative outcome of the power of the people. Let us go forth with his blessing until eternity, one day at a time. What would it take for us to believe another world IS possible and to place every ounce of our energy in that pursuit?

In closing, let us take heed of what the Zapatistas posted after the death of *compañero* Galeano. “We ask ourselves not what we do with his death, but what we do with his life.”² May this anthology offer some lessons for reflection that you find useful in this process.

Until Freedom Always! And Forever!

2. <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2014/05/27/between-light-and-shadow/>

Abstract

This is a closing essay authored by Melanie E. L. Bush for the anthology *Rod Bush: Lessons from a Radical Black Scholar on Liberation, Love, and Justice*, edited by Melanie E. L. Bush, and co-edited by Rose M. Brewer, Daniel Douglas, Loretta Chin, and Robert Newby (2019). She states, “This entire volume is predicated on a belief that Rod Bush was an extraordinary human being. If you are convinced of this, too, then remember that he believed that you, too, are also extraordinary. His soul resided in a profound belief in the power of the people—individually and collectively—and that we must never surrender to anything less than victory. ... Rod Bush truly did believe that love and justice will triumph, as a logical and imperative outcome of the power of the people.” Melanie Bush lists the following as key final lessons from Rod Bush for the pursuit of liberation, love and justice: “(1) *Really try to do our very best whether it is or isn’t “enough”*; ... (2) *Be good listeners and situated in humility, in dialogue*; ... (3) *Be present and enjoy laughter*.”

Author

Melanie E. L. Bush and Rod Bush were partners in their life journey as husband and wife, parents, children, grassroots movement activists, students, teachers, and learners. Their lives individually and together were dedicated to love, family, community, justice and building the better world every day. She is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Adelphi University and a Research Fellow in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of South Africa). Her publications include: *Tensions in the American Dream* (with Rod Bush), *Everyday Forms of Whiteness: Understanding Race in a “Post-Racial” World* as well as many articles and book chapters. Her current research flows from the work she and Rod did together and focuses on solidarity economy projects and resistance to coloniality, white supremacy, capitalism and all forms of domination, oppression and exploitation through the development of a “decolonial” text for the social sciences, with an international team of scholars. She has long been active in movements for justice and is currently on the Leadership Committee and Strategy Team of May First People Link. At Adelphi she is the founder of the Collaboration Project and the Racial Justice Alliance and continues to be actively involved in raising awareness and engaged action. It is in the everyday struggle for social and racial justice and a more loving world that she finds home. Until Freedom, Always... and Forever.