

Walda Katz-Fishman and Jerome Scott

Celebrating Rod Bush: Friend, Comrade, and Revolutionary Warrior

I. Remembering and Celebrating Rod Bush

Rod Bush was a dear friend, a comrade, a humanist, an internationalist, and a revolutionary. He possessed a deep humanity and embodied the reality of daily contradictions. Rod was gentle, yet he was fierce on behalf of the dispossessed, the oppressed, and the exploited. He was loving, yet he was a warrior for those he loved—family, friends, students, colleagues, and comrades—all in struggle for a new world. Rod challenged all forms of capitalist exploitation and systemic oppression rooted in race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. As a revolutionary, he was committed to societal transformation through his theory and his life practice.

Rod Bush's life situated him within many interrelated worlds. He bridged these worlds by the way he moved in them through his understanding of the totality, in his vision of an inclusive global society of justice, equality, love, and peace, and through his political practice

to realize this vision.

Rod lived in a world of Black struggle; and he lived in a world of class struggle. He grasped that these worlds and struggles were interpenetrated in the transformational movement to end white supremacy and the capitalist world-system that produced and continuously reproduced global racism, poverty, and multiple oppressions. Rod lived in a world of social movement and struggle, and he lived in a world of the academy and his profession. His scholarly activism and revolutionary analysis synthesized these worlds, so often in collision.

Through his life and work, Rod Bush expressed a unique dialectical dynamic of theory and practice on the path toward human emancipation. He never wavered and he never looked back. The compassionate human being and warrior for justice that Rod was is firmly rooted within the synergy of theory and practice that was in his very being. Rod expressed the love that Ché Guevara (1965) wrote about: “Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.”

We offer these reflections, with much love and appreciation, for Rod and his life partner Melanie from the perspective of revolutionary Marxists—doing political work in the academy, the profession, and the transformational movement. Rod was a close comrade and co-conspirator on this contradictory and contentious terrain. He refused to dichotomize and separate theory and practice, race and class, the academy and the movement in his life—politically, intellectually, pedagogically, professionally, and practically. Rod is an inspiring and powerful model for all of us.

II. The Power of the Unity and Struggle of Theory and Practice

The critical lesson from Rod Bush’s life that we want to lift up is the power of the unity and struggle of theory and practice. Rod embraced the understanding that: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” (Lenin 1902). Ideas matter, especially in relation to social struggle wherever it takes place. Ideas are powerful

when grasped and put into motion through relationships, through mentoring and being an example of what is possible, through vision, and new forms of political organization and struggle.

For Rod Bush, political practice traversed diverse spaces and places. In his Brooklyn community he was part of the resistance to white supremacist police violence. In the university he engaged and challenged his students to develop a revolutionary consciousness and a transformative practice. In sociology he was a powerful interlocutor among Black radical scholars and Marxist scholars about the necessity of political unity in the twenty-first century revolutionary movement.

Rod's political practice was part of his daily life and social relationships—in his family and community, among his colleagues and students, and with his comrades across the country and the world. It included his scholarship, teaching, mentoring, and the intellectual development of a new generation of movement actors. It was his participation and leadership in various professional sociological associations, leftist projects, and more. It was struggle in the streets.

III. Revolutionary Praxis is Wherever a Revolutionary Lives and Works

Rod Bush's life reveals the truth that revolutionary praxis is wherever a revolutionary lives and works. We met Rod when he had returned to the academy and was confronting the deep contradictions of being a revolutionary intellectual and a scholar within the context of the corporate university. We talked about whether and how it is possible to be both. Rod was grappling with his life decision based on a deep analysis of this complicated reality and the strategy and tactics of making a contribution to the revolutionary movement through working in the academy and doing scholarly work. A few of us were also grappling with this contradiction, and often found ourselves in common spaces and struggles.

Praxis for the academic scholar can be a dangerous and even treacherous process, but has to be engaged. Rod took up the anticapitalist and anti-white supremacist struggle for humanity and for system transformation within the academy and the profession with

a passion and skill that was unparalleled. He brought his whole person to the task—in thought, writing, teaching, mentoring, and as a scholar and sociologist. Rod took seriously the political education work in the classroom of life, whether in the university or in the street. Movement work toward developing revolutionary consciousness and politicizing was wherever he was. Rod often spoke about the “mass line” and the need to meet people where they are, while moving them on the revolutionary path to power. He was able to articulate a theoretically grounded strategy and tactics of the revolutionary process in the language of peoples’ everyday experiences and struggles.

Rod always wrote and spoke with integrity and honesty. He did not compromise the truth in speaking to the people—his students, colleagues, and comrades—or in speaking to power, including the bourgeois overlords of the academy and the profession. He won his share of wrath from the enforcers of bourgeois power and ideology. But at the same time, he always won the love and respect of those in motion.

IV. The Power of Ideas When Grasped by the Masses

In relation to practice, Rod concentrated on developing the intellectual side of the movement through writing, teaching, and scholarly dialogue in many spaces. His work was a profound challenge to systemic ideological hegemony in its various forms. He offered a powerful and persuasive anti-systemic intellectual and political project in an urgent moment of emerging social movements.

Rod Bush’s life embodied the powerful dialectic of practice and theory as it relates to the problematics of race, class, and revolution in the epoch of capitalism and imperialism. History, ideology, culture, and scholarship have created and reproduced a false dichotomy between revolutionary Black Nationalism and Internationalism, and revolutionary class struggle—practically and intellectually. Rod lived in both worlds, embraced their worldviews, and sought through political practice and theoretical articulation to reimagine and reconnect these deeply and dialectically intertwined historical realities, worldviews, and

struggles.

Rod profoundly understood there could be no victory in class struggle without the liberatory participation of Black workers, whose reality and experience is central to the U.S. and global working class. And there could be no victory in the movement for Black and Pan-African liberation without engaging the horrific, murderous, and genocidal logic of global capitalism and empire, which produced and reproduced the reality and ideology of race and white supremacy. For Rod, the emancipation of humanity and the earth from the destructive and criminal system of poverty, violence, and the capitalist world-system is interpenetrated with the struggle to end white supremacy in the United States and globally.

Rod Bush mediated and opened dialogue between the worlds of Marxists and Leftists, and Black Nationalists, and Internationalists in terms of understanding history, theory, and practice. He wrote two very powerful books that became “must reads” for many seeking to understand the dialectics of race, class and revolution in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Rod was a Black revolutionary, and he was a humanist engaged in the struggle for humanity. In *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (1999), he lifted up the historical reality of the capitalist world-system built on the foundation of global white supremacy, and deeply embedded in the American experience of settler colonialism, genocide, slavery, and imperialist wars of conquest. He presented a meticulous study of Black radical social movements in the American century in their context and trajectory. He brought the historical record for the twentieth century into full view for what is to be done in the twenty-first century in this urgent political moment of crisis, fascism, and social motion.

Rod deepened the argument put forward in *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism in the American Century* in his next book, *The End of White World Supremacy: Black Internationalism and the Problem of the Color Line* (2009). He clarified for a new generation of activists and revolutionaries what the 1960s represented, detailing the Civil Rights, Black Power, and anti-Vietnam War movements, and the

emergence of the nonaligned movement in Bandung. Rod refocused and reframed Black radical intellectual currents and movements in the United States in relation to the shift to the global East and South in terms of national liberation and revolutionary motion worldwide.

Through his theory, his analysis, his writing, and his relationships, Rod facilitated intellectual unity and political alignment between the sometimes polarized worldviews and movements of Black Internationalism and Marxism. His life and scholarship demonstrated the deep interpenetration of these global motions. Neither the race question nor the class question can be resolved without embracing the centrality of the Black worker within working class struggle; Black oppression and dispossession cannot be confronted without world revolutionary struggle against capitalism and for socialism. Rod asserted that we are in an age of world revolution, and this time it is critical to end the capitalist world-system and white world supremacy.

V. Practice in the World of the Academy, the Profession, and its Relation to Movement Struggle

Rod lived and worked as a revolutionary scholar, teacher, and mentor in the deeply contradictory and often politically dangerous locations of the university and the professional associations of sociology. His practice in these spaces was rooted in his love and his respect for differences, but also in his clarity about the path toward the systemic transformation of global capitalism and the reconstruction of society in the interests of today's multiracial, multinational, and multigendered working class. Rod was a keen observer and was sensitive to the diverse contributions of colleagues and students. He supported them with a passion and determination to move the intellectual and theoretical conversation toward the revolutionary practice and transformation he knew was necessary.

The academy is an institution for the reproduction of hegemonic bourgeois ideology; and Rod Bush boldly challenged this hegemonic ideology through his pedagogy, scholarship, and mentoring—at some cost to himself. He firmly grasped the need to do intergenerational work to nurture a new generation of students, youth, and revolutionaries

who may never know the reality of a secure job, a stable future, and a life without daily state violence directed toward them.

Rod was a powerful and beloved teacher and mentor. Over the decades his students spoke with affection about his intellectual seriousness, his willingness to debate, his kindness, and his encouragement. Rod was generous with his time and resources. He traveled, on his own dime, from New York to Washington, DC, to discuss *We Are Not What We Seem* (1999) at a Project South Book Forum with Howard University and American University students and faculty. He engaged them in dialogue and pushed them to new ways of thinking and acting. Rod's pedagogical skills, his openness to where people are, and his ability to challenge with love were impressive.

Through pedagogy and practice Rod Bush helped connect today's generation of college students with new social movement processes in the twenty-first century—the social forum as a global movement process across fronts of struggle, race, nationality, genders, class, generations, and ability. He was part of a campus delegation, with Melanie Bush and Adelphi students, to the US Social Forum in Atlanta in 2007 and, again, with Adelphi and St. Johns' students to Detroit in 2010. They emphasized collective study, analysis, reflection, writing, and sharing to facilitate the intellectual and political development of their students and the movement.

Rod's political practice in sociology and the organizations of the profession was extensive and powerful. He brought a lens of race to Marxism and class analysis, and a lens of the capitalist world-system and empire to race analysis, and shared his revolutionary perspective and scholarly activism with all. Rod was active in the American Sociological Association Sections on Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Marxist Sociology, among others, and the Society for the Study of Social Problems. He presented frequently at annual meeting sessions. Rod's life experience and revolutionary theoretical outlook were unique among scholars; he educated and inspired colleagues as well as students. The Marxist Sociology Section awarded Rod Bush the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award for *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (1999). Rod's

colleagues valued and appreciated him for his intellectual power, his unwavering commitment to revolutionary praxis, and his authentic humanity in interaction.

Within the American Sociological Association Rod also led a struggle around the public understanding of sociology. Should the award go to scholars engaged in bottom-up movement practice informed by theory and the moment? Rod Bush fought and won the intellectual and political battle that public sociology encompass and be awarded to scholar activists doing movement education and organizing. In short, revolutionary scholars are public sociologists. This was no small feat.

Rod also made important contributions to left scholar processes including the Left Forum, where he was on the board, and the Black Left Unity Network (BLUN).

Rod embodied in his work and supported colleagues and students engaging revolutionary theory and practice in the world of the academy and sociology, in relation to transformative social movements. He embraced new forms of social struggle and political education in movement spaces. This included ideas, theory, pedagogy, and practice across the spaces of our lives—classrooms, where colleagues would meet, and the street.

Rod's life lifted up the critical importance of mentors and models of alternative ways of being and moving, of thinking, writing, and teaching, in the academy, the profession, and movement worlds. He exemplified this and was a fierce warrior on behalf of and in defense of those of us who have chosen the revolutionary path.

VI. What Is to Be Done?

Rod Bush's life expressed the unity of revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice rooted in loving human relationships. This included everyday life, work in the movement and left organizations, and, yes, in the academy and the profession.

Rod entered the struggle for the hearts and minds of all he encountered—locally, nationally, and globally. He brought love and

patience to this task, but was pushing toward a unity of political forces who could align with the challenge of the twenty-first century across space, place, race, class, genders, nationality, age, and all our diversity.

Rod nurtured the intellectual side of the revolutionary movement. He reminded us that study, writing, and educating are essential aspects of the life and work of a revolutionary today. He modelled how to do this in the very contradictory spaces of our lives.

Rod's very being was deeply rooted in the Black struggle for the end of world white supremacy. He embraced and located that motion within the global context of class struggle to end all exploitation and for human emancipation. Through scholarship and pedagogy he moved us to think and act dialectically, to address historic and contemporary expressions of Black internationalism, global class struggle, and ever present patriarchal and sexist forces in the epoch of revolution against the capitalist world-system.

Rod Bush's love for people, his intellectual and political project of the transformative and revolutionary movement for Black, and class, and gender, and human liberation are a powerful model for us. Rod walked the talk. He was fearless. He spoke truth to power and to all he engaged—family, friends, students, colleagues, and comrades. The truth is power to those forced to transform the world to survive and to love. We celebrate Rod Bush's life and re-commit ourselves to the revolutionary praxis his life embodied.

Abstract

This essay co-authored by Walda Katz-Fishman and Jerome Scott and titled "Celebrating Rod Bush: Friend, Comrade, and Revolutionary Warrior" is a chapter in 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). In the chapter, the authors celebrate the life and work of Rod Bush as a friend, a comrade, and a revolutionary warrior. They locate Bush's theory and practice of the interpenetration of Black struggle and class struggle within today's transformative movement to end global capitalism and world white supremacy. Bush lived and moved within many complex and contentious spaces from the street, to the academy and the sociological

profession. His life's work embodied a powerful unity of revolutionary theory and political practice—his teaching and mentoring, his scholarship and writing, his political education and movement work in his community and in social movement spaces in the United States and the world. For Rod Bush, revolutionary theory and practice was wherever he lived and worked. He understood the need to connect theory and strategy to peoples' lived experience and daily struggles in the classroom and in the street. Through compelling pedagogy, Katz-Fishman and Scott argue, Rod Bush mentored a new generation of transformative thinkers and movement actors. He did the essential work of nurturing the intellectual side of the twenty-first century revolutionary movement. In celebrating Rod Bush's life, the authors re-commit themselves to the revolutionary praxis his life embodied.

Authors

Walda Katz-Fishman, a scholar activist, popular educator and author, and professor of sociology at Howard University since 1970, was a founding member and former board chair of Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide. She served on the National Planning Committee of the U.S. Social Forum and is active in many social justice movement organizations, including the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. She was co-recipient of the American Sociological Association 2004 Award for the Public Understanding of Sociology. She is a contributing author and editor of popular education toolkits and books including *The United States Social Forum: Perspectives of a Movement*, *The Roots of Terror*, *Today's Globalization*, and *The Critical Classroom*; and is author/co-author of numerous chapters and articles on the global capitalist crisis, race, class and gender, and transformative social movements toward socialism. **Jerome Scott**, a former auto worker, labor organizer in the auto plants of Detroit in the 1960s-70s, and member of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, was the founding director of Project South: Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide. He serves on the board of the General Baker Institute, the National Planning Committee of the United States Social Forum, the leadership team of Move to Amend and May First, and is active in social justice movement organizations, including the League of Revolutionaries for a New America. Scott facilitates political and popular education in diverse social movement spaces and organizations in the U.S. South and nationally. He is a contributing author and editor of popular education toolkits and books including *The United States Social Forum: Perspectives of a Movement*, *The Roots of Terror*, *Today's Globalization*, and *The Critical Classroom*; and is co-author of numerous chapters and articles on the global capitalist crisis, race, class, and gender, the revolutionary process, and transformative social movements toward socialism. Jerome Scott was co-recipient of the American Sociological Association's 2004 Award for the Public Understanding of Sociology.

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