

Reflections on Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose from the Perspective of a Former Rutgers University Student and Member of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC)

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Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose was my professor when I was a student at Rutgers University in 1983. The course she taught was *The Black Woman*, and I was excited to finally attend her class. I was scheduled to take her class in 1982 as a freshman, but Dr. Rodgers-Rose advised me to come back as a sophomore. The class met once a week, and it was a difficult course focusing on the history of Black women past and present.

Although the class was about 3 hours, the time went by quickly. I felt an instant connection to Dr. Rodgers-Rose. She was a very knowledgeable and intense instructor. As she presented the weekly assignments, there was mandatory engagement and discussion of the subject matter. I didn't realize at the time that my instructor had received her undergraduate degree with honors from Morgan State University in sociology, anthropology and history in 1958, and a master's degree from Fisk University in 1960, focusing on race and culture; and, then she received her doctorate from the University of Iowa in 1964, becoming the first Black woman in the department and only the 9th Black woman in the United States to earn the doctorate in sociology.

After taking the course with her my sophomore year, upon returning home for the summer I was shocked to see Dr. Rodgers-Rose at the local supermarket, as she lived three blocks from my house. We engaged in conversation and she informed me of the organization she founded, The International Black Women's Congress (IBWC), and asked me to stop by the office. Dr. Rodgers-Rose and IBWC have been in my life ever since. I have also presented my work at the IBWC Annual Conference.

She became my mentor, second mom and greatest supporter. I was in awe of Dr. Rodgers-Rose. She was one of the most intelligent individuals I had ever met; yet she took the time to teach me, support me, and ensure that I understood the need to also be a role model for future African American women leaders. Moreover, she ran for a seat on the local school board. With all her knowledge and love of her community, the politics of Newark did not support her victory. At that point, I became determined to run for the same seat and was successful, becoming an elected member of the Newark School Board.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose is truly an Unsung Hero for the daily contributions she has made to prepare Black women and youth to make a commitment to become exemplary models of womanhood.



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Examples of her work include establishing an *Annual Newark Women's Conference* that was led by the first African American woman elected as Councilmember of the City of Newark: Mildred Crump. She also established the *City of Newark Genesis Rites of Passage Program*—just to name a few.

In addition, as a life-long member of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC), I have been inspired by the pledge we take: to bring harmony with our presence, to speak truth with our voices, to always do justice with our deeds, and to work steadfastly for right. I am an Environmental Justice Advocate today, fighting for the human right to breathe clean air and drink safe affordable drinking water, because of the teaching, mentoring, and leadership of Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose.

At our Annual IBWC Conference I was afforded the opportunity on more than one occasion to meet some of the top sociologists in the world and key national leaders. For example, Dr. Betty Shabazz, Dr. Sharon Brown-Bailey, Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd, and Kwame Ture—to name a few.

Serving as the Founder and CEO of IBWC and having relationships with Black sociologists and other leaders across the United States afforded Dr. Rodgers-Rose the opportunity to organize IBWC Annual Conferences on a variety of topics impacting Black women's lives on a daily basis on a national level. She was able to Lift the Voices of the Voiceless through her work with IBWC.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose is a trailblazer in her field and she has accomplished this with little resources and a loving heart.

I appreciate and love Dr. Rodgers-Rose for getting the work done and Lifting Black Women Up as she climbed. She refuses to leave any woman behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to praise and acknowledge the impact Dr. Rodgers-Rose has had on my life.