

First Person Impression of the Impact of Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose

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I was blessed to begin my African-American studies with Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose as my professor at Princeton University. Her perspective, teachings, critical analysis, and serious inquiry into Black lives elevated the importance and significance of African American studies; but, more importantly, it showed Black students at a predominantly white institution that their lives mattered. Her teachings and mentorship played a significant role in my decision to continue my graduate education in African-American studies at Boston University, and to eventually follow in her footsteps to teach at Rutgers University, and to become the Director of African-American Studies at St. Peters College in Jersey City, New Jersey in the 1990s.

Despite the seriousness of the work we did in class, her sessions also served as community builders for youngsters dealing with their own daily issues in what could be a very unwelcoming space. Her classroom was a safe place to talk in very real ways about who we were, the great diversity and beauty in Black culture, why it was important, and how to share it intellectually **and** soulfully. My favorite classes were on Black women and their roles in society. Her groundbreaking book, *The Black Woman* (1980), served as our guide. Undoubtedly, she strengthened Black women who took her class and encouraged young Black men (and women too) to examine some cultural and social biases that needed challenging in favor of creating a more supportive, respectful, and loving community for everyone.

I also was able to experience and see Dr. Rodgers-Rose as a perpetual agent of social change. Through her leadership of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC), she built a larger community of women. She even honored my mother who, on less than \$10,000 a year, raised eight kids, all of whom achieved multiple degrees in higher education and two of whom were Dr. Rodgers-Rose's students at Princeton University. Dr. Rodgers-Rose really became family when she met with my mother who loved her.

Today, African-American Studies is a highly respected field of critical inquiry – as evidenced by white supremacist challenges to its expansion. It is a field in which most of the credit for its stature goes to men. But, the seminal work, “Dominant Values in Black Culture” (1972) by Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose, laid the groundwork for important theoretical and empirical inquiries into Black culture and life.

I am grateful to be able to join others in honoring such a wonderful, compelling and impactful person – Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose, my mentor and friend.



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