



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Velmanette Montgomery

Esmeralda Simmons

VELMANETTE MONTGOMERY May 14, 2014



Women of
DISTINCTION
HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Esmeralda Simmons



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Award: Supporting New York's Heroes

Year: 2014

Esmeralda Simmons, a resident of Brooklyn, and an activist / leader has been involved in the community empowerment movement and in progressive political causes for more than 38 years. As an attorney, Ms. Simmons specializes in racial justice issues, such as quality public education for students of color and voting and cultural rights. She chooses to work locally with community organizations using advocacy, community education, coalition-building and organizing methods, as well as civil rights and human rights legal tools. A deeply spiritual woman who is grounded in African culture, Ms. Simmons finds constant inspiration in the vision of her ancestors, her belief in peace and her respect for life and cultural diversity.

As the daughter of an immigrant family, Ms. Simmons and her siblings racially integrated a local grammar school; she also integrated the high school that she attended. By the time she entered Hunter College of the City University of New York, Ms. Simmons was an experienced student leader. At Hunter, she was very active in the student protest movement of the late 60s and 70s, and along with other student activists, she led a successful student strike and demonstrated for the creation of the Black and Puerto Rican Studies Department and a student-run cooperative child care center. Ms. Simmons graduated from Brooklyn Law School, and in 1996, she attended Columbia University as a Revson Fellow for the Future of the City of New York.

Ms. Simmons is the founding executive director of the Center for Law and Social Justice in Brooklyn – a small, but very effective community-based legal advocacy and research institution; it is a unit of Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York. Prior to founding the Center, Ms. Simmons already had an accomplished career, and served in various capacities, as: the First Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights for New York State;

law clerk to a federal judge; Civil Rights Attorney for the United States Department of Education; New York State Assistant Attorney General and New York City Assistant Corporation Counsel.

During her career, Ms. Simmons served on several public boards in New York government, including: the NYC Board of Education; the NYC Districting Commission and as Chair of the Environmental Justice Brain Trust for the NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus. Ms. Simmons continues to volunteer her time and skills by serving on the Boards of UPROSE and Little Sun People Early Childhood Educational Center in Brooklyn, and on the Council of Elders for Dance Africa – an organization dedicated to the preservation of African culture.

Ms. Simmons resides in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, with her husband Lesly Jean-Jacques. She is the proud mother of three grown sons and the grandmother of five terrific young people.