

# Committee on Civil Rights

## 2018 Haywood Burns Memorial Award Ceremony and Reception



### Honoring Esmeralda Simmons, Esq.

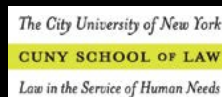
Executive Director,  
Center for Law and Social Justice  
at Medgar Evers College of  
The City University of New York

**Wednesday, November 28, 2018**

**6:00 to 8:00 p.m.**

CUNY School of Law's Auditorium  
and Community room

2 Court Square West,  
Long Island City, NY 11101



# ESMERALDA SIMMONS, ESQ.

Esmeralda Simmons is a prominent civil rights and human rights attorney who focuses on protecting the rights of African descendent people and the disenfranchised. She is a graduate of Hunter College, CUNY and Brooklyn Law School, and served as a Revson Fellow at Columbia University, NY.

She is the founding executive director of the Center for Law and Social Justice, which opened its doors in 1986. The Center is a community-based legal advocacy and research institution based in Crown Heights at Medgar Evers College of The City University of New York. As the director of the Center, Ms. Simmons oversees racial justice public policy campaigns and litigation on behalf of community organizations. She has had established a robust career as a highly respected attorney. Ms. Simmons specializes in racial justice issues such as voting rights, educational inequity, cultural rights, and human rights violations in the US. She has served as the First Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights for New York State, as a New York State Assistant Attorney General, as a New York City Assistant Corporation Counsel and has also served as a law clerk to a federal judge. Major civic appointments include: Vice Chair of the initial New York City Districting Commission (1990-1992), and as the citywide member of the New York City Board of Education (1993-1994).

A community activist and a leader, Simmons has been involved in political community empowerment movements and in progressive political causes for more than 40 years. She chooses to work locally using advocacy, community education, coalition-building and organizing methods as well as legal civil rights and human rights tools. In the media, she is a frequent guest on local, regional and national media outlets. The Root e-magazine named her as one of "America's 20 Leading Black Women Advocating for Change" in 2011. She is often called upon to moderate forums, lecture at colleges and conferences, and is the recipient of numerous awards and distinctions from local, state, and legal organizations. Ms. Simmons received the highly prestigious legal Ida B. Wells-Barnett Justice Award from the New York County Lawyers Assn. and the Metropolitan Black Bar Assn. (2016); the 47th Annual Malcolm X Black Unity Award from the International African Arts Festival and NAKO (2016); she was recognized as Courageous Activist by the Child Welfare Organizing Project (2015) and as a New York State Woman of Distinction by the New York State Senate (2014); she received: Black Agency Executives - Martin Luther King Community Service Award (2014); Medgar Wiley Evers Community Service Award from the Community Council of Medgar Evers College, CUNY (2014); the Mary McLeod Bethune Award by the Central Brooklyn Leadership Council of the First Church of God and Christ, Brooklyn NY (2014). She is very proud to have been named as the Public Interest Lawyer of the Year by the CUNY School of Law in 2005.

In addition to her groundbreaking legal work at CLSJ, Attorney Simmons also volunteers her skills by serving on the Board of Directors of nonprofit community institutions: UPROSE, a climate justice organization, the Council of Elders for African Cultural Heritage, and Little Sun People, an early childhood educational institution. Ms. Simmons has also served on the boards of nationally focused organizations such as the Applied Research Center / RACE Forward, the Poverty and Race Research Action Council (PRRAC), and the Vallecitos Mountain Refuge, Inc., and local organizations: NYCLU, the Fund for the City of New York, and the Fund for Social Change. She has also served as a selection committee member for several major philanthropic fellowships and grants for social justice activists, parents, and youth.

A proud native Brooklynite, Ms. Simmons is a deeply spiritual woman who is grounded in African culture. She is a Yoruba Lukumi priest of Shango in Ile Ase. She finds constant inspiration in the vision of her ancestors, her belief in peace, and her respect for life, and cultural diversity. She is the proud mother of three adult sons and the grandmother of seven. Ms. Simmons lives in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn with her husband, Lesly Jean-Jacques.