

# OUR VOICE

IMAGINE, INTEGRATE, EDUCATE

## EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

## IS EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE OUR 2ND STUDENT NEWSLETTER

"What we all need to do is find the wellspring that keeps us going, that gives us strength and patience to keep up this struggle for a long time" -Winona Leduke

### FEATURED STUDENT: JOE M.

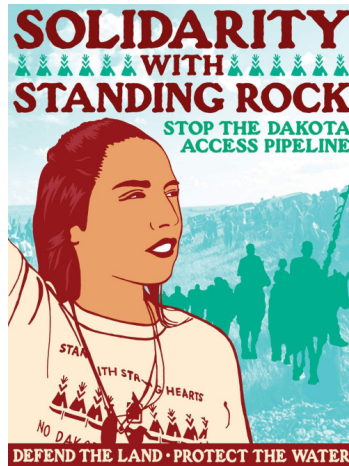
After graduating from La Guardia Community College with an Associate's degree in Psychology, a 4.0 GPA, and acceptance into the national Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society, Joseph Mahmud is now working towards a new goal; obtaining his Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from John Jay College of Criminal Justice! Joe has been a member of College Initiative for three years and has been a peer mentor to a number of students. Using his prior 8 years of experience in banking, Joseph has developed and facilitated a Financial Literacy workshop at College Initiative. In the near future Joe plans to conduct financial literacy workshops to those on parole in conjunction with DOCCs in downtown Brooklyn. Joe stated, "I am no longer linked with a corporation and can now be independent to educate people on financial literacy." Joe's passion for his work comes from "seeing unethical behavior and policies from our government's decisions." He believes "the best way to fight inequality is to gain as much education as you can. Education can help you come out of the poverty line." In the future Joe plans to complete his Master's in Public Administration or his MBA from Baruch and continue to build a family!

The Prisoner Reentry Institute's Educational Initiatives (EI) team is excited to share the second issue of our new student newsletter *Our Voice*. This edition features contributions from students that are part of various EI programs including the Prison-to-College Pipeline Program at Otisville, Brookwood Secure Center, Edgecombe, and Queensborough facilities. It also features pieces from current College Initiative students attending college in New York City community. We want to thank our contributors and encourage students to submit to the next newsletter.



## #NODAPL

Water Protectors in North Dakota are currently resisting construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline because it threatens the health and safety of the environment and water. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, alongside members of hundreds of tribes across the US and Canada, are standing against the dangerous pipeline that runs through sacred Native land. If completed, the 3.8 billion dollar project would carry 500,000 barrels of crude oil per day from North Dakota to Illinois, connecting with a pipeline in Texas. The water protectors are risking their lives to ensure that future generations have access to clean drinking water.



Since August, more than 140 water protectors have been arrested for peaceful actions that halted pipeline construction. In addition to the arrests they have been pepper sprayed, attacked by police dogs, sprayed with water in freezing temperatures, and met with militarized police officers in riot gear. On Sunday, December 4th, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that it denied the Dakota Access Pipeline company the permit to build under the Missouri River. While the struggle to resist capitalist

destruction of the earth is far from over, this is an incredible victory for the indigenous water protectors. Tara Houska, the National Campaign Director for the organization Honor the Earth says, "It is an incredible moment of grassroots organizing reaching the highest level of government." This victory is a testament to the dedication and strength of the water protectors and to the power of collective organizing.

## STAY CONNECTED!



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## WHAT SHE IS (BY CARL BERNARD)

Traveling her time zone, through the storm  
 Waiting at the Garden Of Eden, for she.  
 Do we know what she is, oppressed and abused-  
 if your is ripe – you should understand, but  
 May not care for she, It is a reality that shiver the  
 Skeletal. I rebuke you. It's about, twiddling,  
 your fingers till its cherry red. As the air whistle  
 And wrinkles my shirt. Leaving me teary eyes,  
 Staining my vision playing with my mind. It was at a point  
 Until you think, you see your mother,  
 Throughout the sluggish passing time, reaching out her hand  
 Impulsively you brush the back of your palms  
 against your sight, but it was someone else mother, with  
 a 70's afro. Not having your mother's, process hair.  
 However you can see, the same wrinkles and baggy  
 burden eyes. It does not hide venom, against subordination,  
 the hurtful reluctance to give in to the storm,  
 to the hour that may not have no reason  
 to wait for. Knowing that a man at any point  
 will exercise dominance and want succumb  
 to subordination. "Where not prepared at this  
 moment," the power to  
 Judge for any cause he choose. You love your mother  
 Instantly you can hardly hold on to a heart,  
 ripping in you, love remorse and sympathy, drowns  
 you for your mother, who is not around because  
 she is at the section 8 castle  
 Trying to rest. Rest away the sharp  
 aches under her feet from the hospital, before the  
 rooster wakes then she must attend her studies  
 of Master degree to change her future. Toiling  
 through the clock at work on a strip pole, the  
 occupation you despise.  
 The worst profession ever invented. When  
 was the last time you told she,  
 You love her, massage her feet from long days,  
 Or even gave her a hug? Never have you done,  
 Nothing less than money, so blatant,  
 It is not you being a youth or disabled  
 Not because you are of envy or even represent  
 Or unable to express thy self  
 The presence of a women, no,  
 It's because you don't know what she is.  
 Inspired by Philip Levin (what work is)



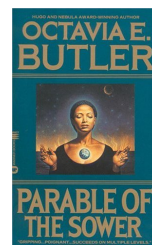
A student working on a mural at Brookwood Secure Center

## PARABLE OF THE SOWER REVIEW

Book Review: *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia E. Butler

Something that is a far cry from the dramatized versions of what the future might entail is what any reader will find printed throughout the pages of this novel. It tackles the question of what might become of some of our country's most prominent issues today well as what it means to believe in god. Butler writes with her pen aimed towards issues most are afraid to acknowledge. *Parables of the Sower* will not disappoint.

By M. a Brookwood College Student



## EXCERPT FROM KACY HARRIS

*Kacy Harris conducted qualitative interviews with various staff members and service users at College Initiative and the Vera Institute. Upon conducting these interviews, he analyzed the data to write about recidivism, contact with the justice system, and access to higher education. The following excerpt is taken from his ten page analysis of these interviews.*

"My interviews depicted the barriers commonly described, which were the need for more funding, housing, and employment opportunities, for individuals who have criminal justice issues. I did learn there are other barriers that individuals with criminal justice involvement face that can influence recidivism, such as stigma, apprehension, grouping, and overgeneralizing, the belief that one cure is the treatment for all individuals returning home from prison. In my opinion, the government has to become more proactive in assisting agencies with funding, which is imperative, on how they impact communities. One of the suggestions I make is the government and donors should consider examining social-impact bonds, which the investor puts up the money and if the program meets all outcomes, the investors pecuniary is restored. This allows the investor to use the same to reinvest back into the organization.

"The staff of The Prisoner Reentry Institute, College Initiative, and the community of Vera Institute have expressed their passion and dedication to their students, organizations, and the work they do. They have also expressed in their sentiments that education is not the only means to eradicating recidivism but is one of the most prevalent methods in restoring dignity and worth back into individuals, as well as communities. With this attitude the College Initiative project of The Prisoner Reentry Institute and their supporting communities will be the trailblazers of individuals who endeavor to reach one of the 2030 United Nations Millennium Sustainable Goals 'Leave No One Behind!'"

# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## MENTOR NETWORKING EVENT

On Friday November 4th, College Initiative hosted the “CI Peer-Mentor Program Networking Event” in the New Building of John Jay College. 25 CI students from the peer mentoring program, including both mentors and mentees, gathered for an evening of academic and professional networking. Jessica Jensen, Coordinator of Academic Counseling & Mentoring, gave opening remarks to welcome everyone to the event. The evening began with hors’ d’oeuvres and refreshments and participants rotated tables getting to know each other. Each table had a vase of discussion prompts focusing on academic and professional goals and experience with higher education. Next, community members participated in an activity called “Where the Wind Blows”, in order to identify shared experiences within the group. CI Student Philip Proszowski closed out the evening by leading an Assata Shakur call and response chant. The chant proclaims, “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.” This was an extremely powerful way to conclude an event rooted in community building, learning from each other, and academic and professional networking.



## DIGNITY IN SCHOOLS

There is a new movement to end the practice of law enforcement in schools targeting students of color. The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) challenges the systemic problem of pushout in our nation's schools and works to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Since 2012, investigations by the Center for Public Integrity have shown that arrests, ticketing, and rough physical contact fall most heavily on students with disabilities and students of color. National data from 2011-2012 pointed to Virginia's rates for police-student contact as the highest in the country; local police data showed that thousands of Black children, many in middle school, were arrested for disorderly conduct in disproportionate numbers. In response to this, DSC holds events, workshops, and an annual National Week of Action Against School Pushout (usually scheduled in October). This has led to legislation being passed to protect young students of color – this month in California, a law pushed by DSC ensured people of all ages right to notification and to challenge designation with law enforcement agency if they are added to a database that identifies gang members. In September, DSC held a congressional briefing calling for “counselors, not cops,” and released a set of recommendations to promote alternatives to harsh school discipline and youth criminalization. Those with Internet access can read more about DSC's policies at <http://www.dignityinschools.org/>

## COLLEGE INITIATIVE'S 13TH MOVIE SCREENING AND PANEL DISCUSSION THROUGH THE EYES OF A JUSTICE-SYSTEM INVOLVED STUDENT

Walking into Gerald W. Lynch Theater for a showing of Ava DuVernay's 13th documentary was an exciting feeling for me. As a John Jay student, I was proud to see organizations that I am part of bring such an important film to my campus. While the college is geared towards “educating for justice,” it was the first time I felt like there was a grand scale effort to evoke authentic, unapologetic conversation and awareness around the topic of mass incarceration in America. Due to my justice-system involvement, most of what was spoken about in the film was not news to me, so I spent much of the evening observing the reactions and energy of the audience members. Everyone was zoned in on the screen and it seemed as if people were in disbelief about what they were witnessing.

What caught me by surprise was the segment that touches on the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). To see all the elected officials and corporations we regularly endorse with our money and votes participating in what appeared to be some sort of legislative conspiracy was unnerving. The audience seemed to feel betrayed and in awe of this moment. Following the film, College Initiative's Bianca van Heydoorn moderated a highly anticipated panel discussion which included Cory Greene, Donna Hylton, Baz Dreisinger, and Marc Ramirez.

Cory spoke about the importance of healing within communities of color and centering youths' voices in discussions that are being had about them – especially amongst young Black men. Donna stressed the importance of creating space for Black women in conversations around incarceration. Baz and Marc addressed the importance of education as a deterrent and even a combatant to individuals being sucked into the prison system. I had the honor of asking a question about how we challenge the phenomenon of former profiteers of human imprisonment from financially benefiting off of the reentry process.

A special shout out goes to Tenisha Morrison and the wonderful staff at College Initiative for putting together such an amazing event in partnership with CUNY's Black Male Initiative, H.O.L.L.A., the Center for Nuleadership on Urban Solutions, and The Incarceration to Education Coalition. President Jeremy Travis showed support by being in attendance, and you could sense the hunger for more events of this nature taking place on campus. We can only hope for a brighter future despite the potential for some resistance on behalf of our government-to-be. It is the people of a nation who control what a society looks like and 13th provides the necessary fuel to push the revolution onward in a most informed manner.

By Steven Pacheco



## STUDENTS TAKE ACTION

### INTERVIEW WITH TERRANCE COFFIE

Terrance Coffie began his academic career at age 39, earning his Associate of Arts Degree in the field of Human Services at Bronx Community College. While he earned his AA, Terrance was supported by the Doe Fund, CUNY's Black Male Initiative, and College Initiative. During his tenure at BCC, Terrance was named to the 2014 Coca-Cola All Academic Team & New York State All Academic Team, and was a member of Phi Theta Kappa, one of the oldest honors societies in the United States. Terrance was also named a Global Fellow by The International Study Program which allowed him to study in Salzburg, Austria and Dachau, Germany. After BCC, Terrance continued his academic journey by earning a scholarship to New York University, where this past May he received his Bachelor's in Social Work from NYU's Silver School of Social Work. While at NYU Terrance was named the 2016 President's Service Award recipient and the 2016 Excellence In Leadership Award recipient. Currently, Terrance is in an advanced standing Master's student in Social Work at NYU and is also hard at work at an internship with the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research. Terrance works at The Doe Fund as both the College Pathways Advisor and Computer Lab Manager. "College Initiative became my surrogate family." Terrance says that as a formerly incarcerated person "I thought my life was over. The Doe Fund and College Initiative were imperative, because they assisted me in finishing something other than a prison sentence." He is proud to serve as a pathway to College Initiative for others utilizing The Doe Fund's services. Terrance is currently working on an art exhibit called "Roses that Grew from Concrete" inspired by the late Tupac Shakur's poem. This project highlights the artistic work of youth who have been affected by the criminal justice system by helping them to develop their artistic talents. "We believe past the pain; we believe past the past," Terrance says. "It's important to have resources available when people are sharing their hopes and dreams." Terrance is looking forward to finishing his Master's in Social Work this year then continue to work in the field of policy. He hopes to further legislation that will make his success more achievable to others. Terrance says, "My life shouldn't be something special. With the proper resources we should be able to change lives and communities."

## WINTER WORD SEARCH

Wolverine, Thor, Iron Man, Dare Devil, Superman, Professor X, Spiderman, The Flash, The Hulk, Catwoman, Electra, Batman

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## CALENDAR

Events listed are open to all CUNY students unless noted

**11/16-2/17** ENDANGERED! Art Exhibit. Open to public! John Jay College.

**2/1-2/28** Black History Month Digital Arts Exhibit. Open to public! Bronx Community College.

**2/1-5/3** Noir: Defining the Melodrama Exhibit. Open to public! Hostos Community College.

**2/8** Robert Bernstein Book Talk on Human Rights. Hunter College. 212-650-3174.

**2/10** Managing Nonprofits Webinar. School of Professional Studies.  
<https://sps.cuny.edu/about/events/webinar-managing-nonprofits-5-tips-success>

**2/14** City of Science Series: The Secrets of Animal Communication. CUNY Graduate Center. 212-817-8215.

**2/17** Breakfast Talk Series: Brooklyn Photography. New York City College of Technology. 718-260-5500.

**2/27** Latino and Bilingual Children's Literature. Lehman College. 718-960-7756.

## STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

If you are interested in being interviewed or having your work featured in the newsletter please contact us at [pristudentnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:pristudentnewsletter@gmail.com) or mail in your submissions to:

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