

# OUR VOICE

IMAGINE, INTEGRATE, EDUCATE

We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society.-Angela Davis

## FEATURED STUDENT: HERNAN

Hernan Carvente, an alumni of John Jay College, has been a College Initiative (CI) student since 2012. While at John Jay College, he studied Criminal Justice. He earned credits through the Brookwood College Program, a satellite of Columbia-Greene Community college, located within the Brookwood Secure Center in Claverack, NY. Hernan is passionate about his work at the Vera Institute for Justice, whose mission is to “urgently build and improve justice systems that ensure fairness, promote safety, and strengthen communities.” Hernan works to incorporate youth and family voices in juvenile justice reform efforts. He served on the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's (CJJ) National Youth Committee, where he shared his story and participated in collaborative social change at the national level. He is interested in working with the young adult community, and wants to continue the conversation around the need for supportive adolescent services; particularly to help young people re-enter society and those who commit more serious offenses. In addition to advocacy, Hernan is interested in writing and hopes to begin blogging. Additionally, he enjoys spending time with his friends and his eight-year-old daughter. Hernan has been an inspiration to many students on the inside and out. He has attended Brookwood Secure Center visits with CI in the hope of serving as proof of what determination and community support can accomplish. One of Hernan's many positive messages to the youth is, “No matter how much time you have done, there are people who believe in you- even if you can't see them. You will always have people in your corner, myself included.”

## COLLEGE INITIATIVE TURNS 15!



College Initiative (CI), a project of the Prisoner Reentry Institute's Educational Initiatives, is proud to announce its 15th anniversary. For over 15 years, College Initiative has assisted students with earning 300 degrees and has helped over 1200 students apply to CUNY colleges and begin their academic journeys. CI's dedicated staff have created and nurtured a strong student member community over the

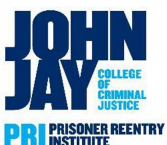
years and built a strong community presence as an organization whose mission is to “create pathways from criminal justice involvement to college and beyond and to establish and support communities invested in their own success.” Happy Anniversary College Initiative!

## #ADAYWITHOUTAWOMAN

March 8th has been International Women's Day for more than one hundred years. The day of action included a coordinated women's strike, marches, protests, and wearing red in solidarity with movements for liberation. According to the day of action organizers, this movement is not just in response to Trump, but also in response to the systems of oppression that gave rise to a xenophobic president. Organizers asserted, “In the spirit of solidarity and internationalism, in the United States March 8th a day of action organized by and for women who have been marginalized and silenced by decades of neoliberalism directed towards working women, women of color, Native women, disabled women, immigrant women, Muslim women, lesbian, queer and trans women.” In New York City, thousands of participants gathered at Trump International Hotel to stand against sexism, racism, Islamophobia, Xenophobia, and neoliberalism. Thirteen activists were arrested for their acts of civil disobedience outside of Trump Tower. Thousands of protesters also gathered in Washington Square Park for a rally and march in support of a global intersectional feminist movement.



## STAY CONNECTED!



@JohnJayPRI



@PrisonerReentryInstitute



@PrisonerReentryJJ

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## TINA AND SOCIAL CHANGE FOR WOMEN

CI Student Tina Tinen is currently a full-time college student, mother, and activist. Before beginning college and advocacy work, she overcame many difficult obstacles. When she came home, she was mandated to an outpatient program that met three times a week and had parole meetings every two weeks. The outpatient program took nine months to complete, which made it difficult to begin school. Tina explains, "College Initiative helped me believe that I am capable of earning a degree." Upon navigating and overcoming these challenges, Tina is currently an honors student at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) studying human services.



Tina is a recipient of the prestigious Susan B. Anthony award from the National Organization for Women. She earned this distinguished award for her fierce advocacy, leadership, and commitment to social justice. When asked about her passion for social justice Tina explained, "I think a lot of people who have been affected by the criminal justice system would find advocacy work therapeutic. It is a way of fighting back and uncovering things that go on." She is a leading member of the Incarcerated Mothers Committee of the Coalition for Women Prisoners, an alliance advocating for the specific needs of women with justice-system contact.

Tina played a leading role in the campaign to ban the practice of shackling pregnant women that are incarcerated in New York State. She has given public speeches, spoken on panels, and directly impacted policy members and legislators with her powerful voice. Her advocacy directly contributed to the fact that New York State now has one of the most progressive anti-shackling laws in the United States. She is also working with the Women's Building to transform the former Bayview Women's Prison into a hub for social justice activism. According to their site, "The Women's Building stands for what's possible when the potential of girls and women is nurtured rather than locked away." Tina is a person who truly embodies academic dedication and commitment to radical social change.

"My energy just couldn't stop dancing. I was caught up in the music of struggle, and I wanted to dance."

-Assata Shakur

## THE SWEET SOUND OF MUSIC BY DEXTER

Composing music for the Carnegie Hall's Musical Connections program during my incarceration was an inspiring moment and honor for me and my best friend Pedro. Daily we had to overcome many obstacles. We understood that living in a maximum-security prison meant that we were limited in terms of what we could do. Fortunately, the facility had a music room, a classroom to learn music theory, and instruments. On the other hand, we were not allowed to record our jam sessions during rehearsal, which meant that without recordings many inspiring moments and original music would be lost forever. While at Sing-Sing, Pedro and I drew up a proposal which we handed over to Carnegie Hall so that the prison's administration would at least consider recording during concert days. Because of Carnegie's influence- and to our surprise- our proposal was heard and accepted. From that point on, Pedro and I made a vow that whenever either of us were released from prison we would begin building a haven for formerly incarcerated persons to record their music, extending free sessions to those recently released. So far we've recorded a few talented artists. Our studio is called New World Productions.

I know what it's like to be passionate about something and being told that you can't pursue it because of past mistakes. There are some who believe the purpose for jails and prisons is to punish and not give opportunities to sing, dance, act or create. But not everyone in prison is guilty of the crime they have been sentenced to, and what about rehabilitation? Throughout my 20 years of incarceration, I have joined many transitional programs like Hudson Link's Mercy College and Carnegie Hall's Musical Connection program. Both programs were equally helpful and therapeutic and lead to my personal recovery. Had it not been for either institution I don't think I would have ever made it home. I really don't think that I would be able to assist another person without having healed myself first. I truly am glad that Pedro and I can give our brothers and sisters that had a brush with the criminal justice system a medium or voice to express themselves. Our next project will be a film based on the lives and transition of formerly incarcerated, homeless individuals. We welcome any ideas, opinions or comments from readers of this article.





# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## STUDENT-LED WORKSHOPS



The 2017 College Initiative Workshop Series kicked off with an informative workshop on accessing college scholarships. The workshop was led by CI student, Selena. In this workshop, students learned how to apply for scholarships specific to their career paths and goals, and learned ways to

find scholarships that were specific to their personal backgrounds. The series continued with a brand-new workshop from Blueprint, an organization dedicated to assisting students with specific wellness needs. Additionally, John Jay College's Career Center led a workshop on mock interviewing and resume building. This workshop helped students craft their resume and become familiar with the interviewing process. Many other student workshops have taken place this year. CI alumni, Roman led an informative workshop on barriers to employment; specifically around the Fair Chance Act enacted in New York City. Roman informed students of their rights as job applicants in NYC and how to use the Fair Chance Act to find and secure employment. Finally, our Financial Literacy Workshop was hosted by CI student Joseph, where students learned about their credit scores and online banking. Our series came to an end after our annual College Initiative Town Hall!

## SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION HIGHLIGHT

Earlier this year, the Academy for Justice-Informed Practice held a training on supported education for justice-involved individuals. The training focused on opportunities for recovery. College Initiative collaborated with Blueprint Supported Education, an organization for people with histories of mental health conditions and criminal justice involvement that promotes education as a key element of empowerment, wellness, and personal fulfillment. "Education should be considered a wellness strategy," says Jonathan Payne, Blueprint Supported Education Specialist. "And the accommodations that our students receive to succeed modify the 'how', not the 'what' of the program." He explained to the audience that Blueprint implemented specific wellness strategies for any "warning signs" a student may display during times of stress, and advised that having this "wellness plan" is what made their organization a success. College Initiative discussed strategies for how to think ahead and plan for stressful times in a student's career – whether that be the first week of school, midterms, or finishing up the year. Both programs tailor their services to each student, as each student will have a different academic journey. As CI Program Coordinator, Carlos Quintana said, "Each student owns their education." The day ended with students speaking about their experiences with each organization, and a call to action to reaffirm and commit to CUNY's mission of serving underserved populations. College Initiative hopes to work with Blueprint again in the future! You can learn more about Blueprint by visiting <http://www.blueprintsed.org/>

## FEATURED STUDENT: EBONY BROWN

Our students may see her as their Academic Counselor, but Ebony Brown has been a College Initiative student for six years. After graduating from Hostos Community College, Ebony is now pursuing her BA in sociology and hopes to enroll in Hunter College's revered Silberman School for her Master's degree in Social Work. Ebony got her start with College Initiative by enrolling in the New York City Justice Corps program. Ebony explained, "I met a lot of people there, I did a lot of networking; built my resume; gained extra experiences. A career specialist referred me to CI and my counselor was incredibly supportive. He got me enrolled at Hostos and I graduated in 2015." Ebony has since been working at CI. She serves nearly 90 students, each with "different perspectives on life." Says Ebony, "I hear our students' unique stories. I want to continue helping individuals pursue their dreams – something they could have done years ago if their circumstances had been different." She hopes to bring something special to her students, "I give both academic and interpersonal support. I'm there to assist our students and want them to know the support I have to provide is unconditional. I'm very much involved with the students I work with."

Eventually, Ebony wants to be a licensed social worker and build her own practice. "After working with CI for some time, I see myself continuing to network with other organizations that are committed to working with the population CI serves," she says. "Hopefully, when I move on with my future endeavors, the person who takes on this role is as committed as I am, and continues to assist the individuals who need support the most." When Ebony is not working at her full-time job or studying for her classes, she spends time with her daughter. "I try to keep that bond with my child. I keep some availability and space for her." When asked what she's looking forward to next, Ebony smiles. "I look forward to a successful 2017 graduation, and the fifteenth anniversary of CI. I'm filled with so much gratitude to be part of that."



Illustration by Donna Gay

## WORD SEARCH

Busta Rhymes, Eminem, Tyga, Snoop  
Dogg, Fiftycent, Dr. Dre, Rakim,  
Macklemore, Kanye West, Nas, Young  
Jezzy, Jay Z, Tupac, Ice Cube, Drake

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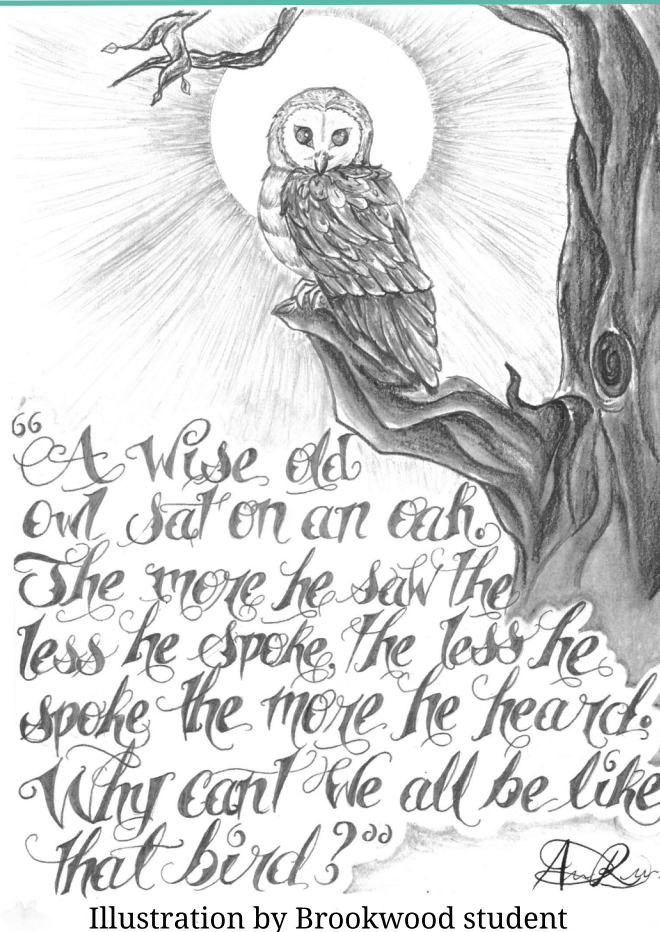


Illustration by Brookwood student

## 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:

John Jay College - PRI  
ATTN: EI Student Newsletter  
524 W. 59th Street 609B BMW  
New York, NY 10019



You're invited to the  
College Initiative Graduation  
JUNE 22, 2017  
6-8:30pm



John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
2nd Floor Student Dining Hall  
524 W. 59th Street  
New York, NY 10019

Join us for dinner and cake!

RSVP AT  
[HTTP://JOHNJAYPRI.ORG/2017CIGRADUATIONRSVP/](http://JOHNJAYPRI.ORG/2017CIGRADUATIONRSVP/)

## CALENDAR

Events listed are open to all CUNY students unless noted otherwise.

**3/16-6/10** "Rewoven: Innovative Fiber Art." Art exhibit. Open to public! Queensborough Community College.

**4/19-5/18** "Don't Grab My Papaya!" Art exhibit. Open to public! College of Staten Island.

**4/21-5/19** "Self-Taught Art from Latin America and the Caribbean: The Aldemaro and Ana Romero Collection." Art exhibit. Open to public! Baruch College.

**5/8** CUNY Health Equity Conference. Open to public! Lehman College. RSVP [jonathan.rose@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:jonathan.rose@lehman.cuny.edu)

**5/20-5/28** Heartbeat Opera presents "Madame Butterfly." Student tickets \$15. Baruch College. 866-811-4111.

**5/22** Classix: A Reading Series Celebrating Classic Plays by Black Playwrights. 4:30-9pm. Open to public! CUNY Graduate Center. 212-817-1869.

**5/31** "Year Up" Information Session. 2-4pm. Borough of Manhattan Community College. Open to all BMCC students. [cmerriweather@yearup.org](mailto:cmerriweather@yearup.org)