

OUR VOICE

IMAGINE, INTEGRATE, EDUCATE

"You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable."
Ta-Nehisi Coates

PRI EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES ANNOUNCES FIRST STUDENT NEWSLETTER

FEATURED STUDENT: VICTOR

Victor Polanco is one of the 2016 recipients of the BMCC Foundation Inc. Scholarship. BMCC Foundation Inc. offers scholarships to full and part time students attending BMCC who have a minimum 3.0 GPA and who show commitment to the campus and their communities through volunteering.

Victor is a Housing Case Manager at the Fortune Society working with individuals who have a history of substance abuse or have been formerly incarcerated. As a Housing Case Manager, Victor links individuals returning back to the community to vital services including housing, vocational training, employment, and medical and financial support. Currently, he is pursuing his Associates of Science in Human Services at BMCC. He enrolled in August of 2015 and has already accumulated 24 credits and has maintained a 3.2 GPA all while working and attending classes full time! Victor hopes to continue pursuing his academic journey and hopes to attain his License in Clinical Social Work to continue supporting individuals in the reentry community.

The Prisoner Reentry Institute's Educational Initiatives (EI) team is excited to share the first issue of our new student newsletter, *Our Voice*, that aims to elicit imagination, promote integration, and allow for education to occur from all aspects of life. This newsletter will capture the narratives of the students that are a part of EI programs, which include Prison-to-College Pipeline at the Otisville, Edgecombe, and Queensborough facilities, College Initiative, and our students at the Brookwood facility. We hope that *Our Voice* will facilitate a greater relationship between our communities and enable us to get to know one another and the work that we are involved in. Moreover, this newsletter will serve as a platform that will lead to conversations, networking opportunities, and a chance to showcase your personal successes!



#BLACKLIVESMATTER

The Black Lives Matter movement has pushed itself into national conversation over and over. While Black Lives Matter was initially one of the hundreds of organizations protesting in Ferguson, Missouri, they eventually emerged as one of the best-organized and visible groups with its slogan, "#BlackLivesMatter."



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It incorporates "traditional" Black freedom movements, including women, people with disabilities, people without citizenship documents, and people who identify with the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Moreover, with the creation of a web-page, independence of corporate media control, its use of social media to organize, and online conference calls to plan strategy, Black Lives Matter has become a model for how Black liberation groups in the twenty-first century can organize an effective human rights campaign. The Movement for Black Lives recently released a policy platform. Those with Internet access can see the policies at <https://policy.m4bl.org/>. -Written By Anna Giannicchi & Miggie Garcia

STAY CONNECTED!



@JohnJayPRI



@PrisonerReentryInstitute



YouTube @PrisonerReentryJJ

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"I'M SORRY KALIEF" BY JOHNNY PEREZ

Dear Mr. Browder,

I wish I could find the words to express our sorrow, our regret, and our shame. Our transgression that we, as an American society, have committed against you, and every other person like you! I am ashamed that we live in a country where we treat animals better than humans, but, we treat some humans like animals. See, I too know how it feels to spend your days locked inside of a human cage. See, I served 13 years, but you served LIFE. I did it, and you didn't. Kalief, I'm ashamed that we live in a country where we victimize people, to teach people not to victimize people. Where we kill people, to teach people not to kill people. Where we hold people against their will without due process, and then talk about bail reform. Ha, somebody go process that. In America, 80,000 men, women, and children, yes I said *children*, (#RaiseTheAge) are held in solitary confinement. Where it gets so quiet you hear your heartbeat, or it's so loud you can't close your eyes to go to sleep. And if you're really lucky a correction officer will handcuff you, pull you out of your cell and slam you, and slam you. Until his thirst for violence becomes a culture of violence. That is met with a blue wall of silence and still we ask where are the prosecutions? I'm scared Kalief. I'm scared of becoming another hashtag on a t-shirt, Kalief. I'm afraid of dying inside of a cell Kalief (#BradleyBallard). I'm scared that I too may fit the profile of being a young black man who is minding his business. I'm afraid Kalief, of being choked to death (#EricGarner), of being shot in the back (#WalterScott) and most important of all, I am afraid that your death will be in vain and Rikers will remain the same (#ShutRikersDown).

**CASSIE B. VS. CASSIUS CLAY
BY TRISHA PARKER**

"I got my wine and Imma beat yo behind
and choke you like this... I'm your King.
I'm King Cassie B to you. You know what I mean?"

The Thunderbird had barely left the fridge,
but Cassie B. was already cocky, mean-spirited
and had launched another fight with MyDear.

"Yeah, you going down tonite."

As Cassius Clay said, one can go down but it is best
not to stay down. He who has courage, takes risks.

It was his job to beat people up.

You must think you're Cassius Clay, but your name's
Cassie B. You ain't nothing like him, nothing at all;
always beating me up. But, I'm a woman. A woman.

Can't nobody make nothing outta you it seems;
but Cassius Clay spoke of penicillin, and moldy bread.
Penicillin is made from it, so there's hope for you, after all.

But, he said it when he never even knew your name
and never ever knew your fame, But the police,
the police, they know all about you, all about your big
paws too.

They also know Cassius Clay's big fists fought
man after man and beat 'em down, all the way
down. Same stuff you do to me.

I'm so tired of black eyes, your big paws.

Imma keep me a big butcher knife, for protection.
You sure ain't nobody's King, but I know what you are.

STUDENTS TAKE ACTION**A MESSAGE FROM COLLEGE INITIATIVE
GRADUATE: JESSE GUERRO**

"Throughout this academic journey towards this Bachelors of Arts degree, one of my more prominent motivations was to not defer this challenging work to some future generation to have to figure out for the first time on their own. The consideration of possibly contributing to a positive legacy for my family and those similarly situated to me (with regard to incarceration) has helped sustain my motivation to 'A Total Commitment to the Process of Earning this Degree'. No achievement occurs in isolation-- I have been humbled by the open



support and recognition that I have received from this community. My success is OUR success."

Jesse graduated from Queens College this past May with a Bachelors of Arts in Political Science-- Congratulations Jesse!

**FROM P2CP TO JOHN JAY COLLEGE:
DEVON SIMMONS**

After overcoming numerous adversities and being sentenced to eighteen years in prison, Devon Simmons is the first student to graduate the Prison-to-College-Pipeline program. He has graduated with an Associate's degree at Hostos Community College, and will be majoring in Criminal Justice at John Jay College in the Fall. Devon is also participating in Columbia University's Justice-in-Education Initiative, and now serves as a Peer Mentor for College Initiative. While Devon studies at John Jay, he hopes to "bring a different perspective about the criminal justice system to others, beyond the textbook", and to "change the classroom narrative." When Devon is not in the classroom, he enjoys making people smile, practices yoga, and serves as an example to future justice involved students. He hopes to be "a sign of hope" for higher education, and strongly believes that "consistency is the key to success." Looking forward, Devon will be traveling to Cambridge University in England, to speak about his experiences in a prison-education program. More recently, Devon participated in a panel at the Second Chance Act, convening in Washington, D.C.!



COLLEGE INITIATIVE'S GRADUATION

On June 29th, College Initiative hosted their annual Graduation Ceremony. This year we came together to celebrate the graduation of 23 students graduating with their Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, and Juris Doctor degrees. The graduates came from various college campuses throughout NYC, including several CUNY campuses and private institutions. The Prisoner Reentry Institute's Executive Director Ann Jacobs kicked off the event with welcoming words followed by the Educational Initiatives Director, Bianca Van Heydoorn. Invited guests included Councilman Jummane Williams, the night's keynote speaker, Benay Rubenstein, CI's founder, and Dr. David Gómez, the President of Hostos Community College. The ceremony came to a close with the distribution of the graduation plaques followed by beautiful speeches by each of the graduates who attended. This year we also surpassed the 300 mark in degrees earned by our students. *Congratulations Class of 2016!*



QUEENSBORO COMPLETION CEREMONY

Our Prison-to-College Pipeline Program Coordinator, Katie Schaffer, recently celebrated another successful completion of the College Readiness class at Queensboro Correctional Facility. The three-week intensive course taught by CUNY professors prepares students in reading and writing. Katie explained the benefits of the course, how it creates a space to share opinions and analysis of the world, and how the professors and students grow to care for each other. The completion ceremony is a celebration of the work they have done, as well as an opportunity to hear about College Initiative. "We'll be ready to support them when they go back to school," Katie says, "and we get their contact information, and give out our own, to invite and welcome them to our community. We deeply hope people will be in touch." Between pizza and certificates, students take time to share what the class has meant to them, and their future goals. One student described how he hasn't been in a classroom since 1980, and what it meant to return to a classroom with a professor who was invested in his success and who had respect for what he was doing. Here's to more successful Queensboro completion ceremonies to come!

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE SUMMER PROGRAM

This summer marks the sixth annual Hostos Summer Program. Students who participate in the program aim to improve their scores on the CUNY Assessment Test, with the help of program instructors from the Hostos Academic Learning Center. Program instructors have been praised by students for their ability to effectively break down complex math concepts, and their writing techniques. With over twenty students enrolled, this year the Hostos Summer Program announced one of its greatest victories: all of this year's program participants passed the reading portion of the CUNY Assessment Test! And the success of the Hostos Summer Program goes beyond this victory. This year the program is providing students with MetroCards, and the Monday Workshop Series is covering topics such as: *Financial Literacy*, *Rap Sheet to Resume*, and *Email, Gmail, & Beyond*. Students who complete the program and pass the CUNY Assessment Test are invited to attend the annual completion ceremony, where students are honored for this great accomplishment.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON CAMPUS? BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- 10/16 Breast Cancer Walk (Register at <http://main.acsevents.org/goto/BMCC2016>.)
- 10/18 LGBTQ Pride Month: Don't Rent a U-Haul Yet: Emotional Health & Lesbian Existence
- 10/18 LinkedIn and Networking Workshop (Registration information at (212) 220-8170)

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

- 11/7 CUNY Dance Initiative MAWU An Urban Dance Company (Registration information at (718) 518-4455)
- 09/19-12/7 5th Bronx Latin American Art Bienal / Biennial (Registration at (718) 518-4455)

FEATURED STUDENT: LUMUMBA

"Education gives you access that can't be denied. It [helps] to break any stigma." These are Lumumba's words of advice to anyone who will ask him about the importance of an education. Currently he is participating in Columbia University's Justice-in-Education Initiative, has spent time with film stars, and was featured on the radio show, On the Count. Lumumba was introduced to college through the Prison-to-College Pipeline Program. His journey to pursuing higher education was one of his priorities upon release. He believes that "education was the last effort to find and motivate [himself]." His desire is to "always use his education for the sake of the land" and make resources available to the communities that need them. Lumumba plans to do this by combining his Community Health major with film and humanities, to promote health and mental hygiene services. His ultimate goal is to help people with these needs connect with their community.



In 1992, 17 year-old Domingo made a decision that cost him many years of his life. Although he was one of the youngest to be involved with the criminal justice system, today Domingo is successfully participating in Columbia University's Justice-in-Education Initiative, is the Scholar in Residence at For Freedoms, and has been chosen to be featured in a NPR Latino segment.

When Domingo is not in the classroom or working, he enjoys playing handball, doing origami, and reading. Domingo can make more than 300 pieces of origami from memory and has presented on the topic of origami in his public speaking class at Otisville. Additionally, he has read a vast array of books including *Dante's Inferno*, Plato's *Republic*, and *The Book of Job*. For the future Domingo hopes to "[use his] experience to impact the lives of others." He believes that he can teach individuals, including troubled youth, how to control their emotions through Daniel Goleman's concept of "brain hijacking," from the book *Emotional Intelligence*. Domingo hopes his experience and his story will impact the lives of others. Moving forward his future goals are to major in criminal justice and minor in humanities. Lastly, he hopes to become a motivational speaker one day.



WORD SEARCH

Vacation, Swimming, Pool, Lemonade, Limeade, Ice Cream, Man of Steel, Baseball, Camp, Video Games, Lake, Beach, Shopping, Drama Free, Boating, Hot Dogs, Movies, August, June, July

O	I	E	U	E	L	E	M	O	N	A	D	E	M
M	M	S	E	M	A	G	O	E	D	I	V	I	A
C	E	T	B	M	S	G	O	D	T	O	H	C	N
M	D	S	L	O	M	Y	L	U	J	U	N	E	O
S	A	A	W	V	A	N	E	R	A	E	K	C	F
H	E	B	N	I	V	T	W	S	N	A	A	R	S
O	M	E	S	E	M	A	I	O	L	P	U	E	T
P	I	A	I	S	P	M	C	N	N	M	G	A	E
P	L	C	A	O	L	E	I	A	G	A	U	M	E
I	S	H	O	V	C	I	N	N	T	C	S	P	L
N	E	L	F	S	E	B	P	G	G	I	T	E	S
G	B	A	S	E	B	A	L	L	A	O	O	J	S
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SUDOKU

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			7					

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SCHOLARSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Women's Forum of New York Education Fund Awards (For more info, please visit (<http://www.womensforumny.org/index.cfm/education-fund/>)

Application opens on 9/1

New York Water Environment Association Scholarship (For more info, please visit <http://nywea.org/scholarship/>)

Deadline February 17

David C. Lizarraga Fellowship (For more info, please visit <http://telacu.com/telacu-education-foundation/graduate-school-support/david-c-lizarraga-fellowship/>)

Deadline February 26

The Roothbert Fund Scholarships (For more info, please visit <http://www.roothbertfund.org/scholarshipsprogram.php?p=roothbert-fund-scholarships>)

Deadline January 31

CALENDAR

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

10/13: John Jay Graduate School Fair 2016 (Open to John Jay students and alumni only)

10/13: Free Microsoft Workshop Learning Resource Center (Open to all students), email ldinkins@bmcc.cuny.edu

10/13: John Jay Graduate School Fair (Open to John Jay students and alumni only.)

10/14: New York City LSAC Law School Forum (Registration required: <http://www.lsac.org/2016forums/>)

10/15: CUNY Admissions Information Session (Registration required) email: admissions@lagcc.cuny.edu

11/2: LGBTQ+ Support Group College of Staten Island

11/10: Immigration 101 Workshop (Email: james.simmons@baruch.cuny.edu)

STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

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

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