

The Children of the People

Writings by and about CUNY students on race and social justice

Rose M. Kim, Grace M. Cho and Robin McGinty, Editors

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Foreword

MICHELLE FINE

“You’ve been CUNYied”: a (self) mocking recognition that erupts when students find weird, enraging, unexpected fees attached to their already too high tuition bills; when faculty or staff receive checks late or for amounts much smaller than anticipated; when program staff are thanked by administrators, “You have been amazing, a life saver, but with austerity, well you understand, it may be just one more month.”

CUNY is like a lover you should—but can’t—leave. You know they will break your heart, but there’s a magic, seduction, and often a betrayal. But then a student who shines; a class that sings; a policy victory; a book you take to bed that you never would have known about....

You know it will be a struggle; there may be a diploma, or full-time job, or promotion—or not.

You are nourished by the energy, the protests, the histories, the wild ideas just voiced in a classroom by the person with full body tattoos, pink hair and piercings, sitting next to the Afghan war vet, next to someone with an UNDOCU-QUEER t-shirt, next to someone deeply religious—debating *the uses of anger* by Audre Lorde.

Something keeps us hanging around. It’s certainly not the pay

Editors' Introduction

ROSE M. KIM, GRACE M. CHO AND ROBIN MCGINTY

We write this introduction in May 2021, well over a year since the Covid-19 pandemic upended daily life with the imposition of quarantines, shifts to online workplaces and classrooms, and mandatory social distancing in public, a situation only recently abating with rising numbers of the vaccinated. Furthermore, the pandemic has laid bare the economic and racial contradictions that divide us. In the past year, while 76 million Americans lost work, creating widespread food insecurity and fears of eviction, especially among people of color and immigrants, the collective wealth of American billionaires increased from \$2.95 trillion to \$4.56 trillion during the same period (Collins). As the federal government continues to refuse entry, imprison, and deport undocumented migrants fleeing desperate situations, often the results of U.S. military interventions, such as in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, it overlooks their widespread employment as “essential workers” in various sectors of the U.S. economy, e.g., agriculture, construction, and hospitality.

Similarly, on April 21, almost a year since Minneapolis police officers suffocated 46-year-old George Floyd to death, igniting the largest mass protests against systemic racism and police brutality

Education, My Refuge

JAIME RODRIGUEZ

I am a 27-year-old, visually impaired Hispanic man of humble beginnings. I have seen and experienced my fair share of social injustice, having grown up in the projects in a crowded city and having attended underfunded schools in an underserved community. This essay details my journey into academia while battling social stratification and injustice and explains how the City University of New York has helped me to rise above what I was born into and allowed me to blaze my own path.

I grew up in a tiny two-bedroom apartment in the Gowanus Houses, one of the many housing complexes run by the New York City Housing Authority, which serves the city's lowest-income residents. As a community of working-poor individuals and families, not much was expected of us and the chances of us managing to change our social location was low. While reflecting on my personal experiences in my introductory sociology course at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). I learned that one's social location is a leading indicator of the outcome of a person's life. I learned how it helps determine our role in society, our social class, and any benefits or conflicts we may face in life. I also learned how it determines how easy or difficult one's

On the Election of Donald Trump and Saving Ourselves

MAYA GARCIA

I can vividly remember the election of Donald Trump. The endless months leading up to that fateful November, the long list of celebrities lining up in favor of a certain Mrs. Clinton and priding themselves on the civility and sophistication of their candidate, the ongoing jokes about the stupidity of each and every Trump supporter, all the friends I unfriended or unfollowed online if I found any opinion that even remotely disagreed with my own—all of those memories are crisp in my mind like it's still 2016.

I was then a college freshman at Brooklyn College—more energetic and enthusiastic than I am now, and probably too excited about voting in my first election. The Democratic Party had already disappointed me that year, whether it was by ignoring and sabotaging the support of Bernie Sanders, a candidate I felt actually saw and heard me. Not to also mention the ongoing racism from the Democratic Party—anybody remember the racist comments referring to the Latinx outreach as “taco bowl engagement” from a leaked email from Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the then-chair of the Democratic National Committee. Like more than an ample amount of Americans, I was simultaneously excited to vote, but upset about the choices I thought I was forced to choose from.

Mirroring Ngin-Ngin

ALISON MEI WONG

Growing up as a mixed-race Chinese-German-American born in the Bronx, New York, my appearance often unsettled people. Strangers passing on the sidewalk would take a double look at me, their eyes deglazing from the floor, before asking, “What are you...? No, no, where are you really from?” to try to understand why I looked different. They often found it difficult to put me into an aesthetic category. I struggled to answer this question. After responding that I was born in the Bronx, and not in China or Germany, they would look satisfied, as if I had fulfilled their curiosity.

But I often began to question internally, “Who am I really?” after answering these questions. When I would share my experience with my sister, the other half-Asian in the family, she would laugh in disbelief.

“That never happens to me, and it has nothing to do with how you look—who are you even hanging out with?” she said.

“But it’s not just people I know—it’s random people, like the crossing guard or an interviewer for a job,” I said.

“No, that just happens to you,” she said.

While my father was born in Hong Kong, he has lived in New

Twenty Years at CUNY

A Political Coming-of-Age

ROSE M. KIM

On November 4, 2008, in my darkened studio apartment, I sat hunched at my desk, glued to the bluish screen of my small laptop showing a brightly colored TV studio set emblazoned with stars, stripes and the U.S. presidential seal. Minutes before polls were to close in five western states, Wolf Blitzer, the white, white-haired, white-bearded CNN news anchor, told the audience that when the clock hit eight on the west coast, the next president would most likely be instantly known. As the on-screen digital clock ran down, Blitzer said, portentously, “This is a moment that could potentially be rather historic.” As predicted, within seconds after the clock hit 8 p.m., my home state California weighed in with 54% for Barack Obama and 38% for John McCain; yielding 55 electoral votes, it was enough to establish a clear victory for Obama, the very first Black president of the United States.

The screen switched next to Grant Park in downtown Chicago, where an ocean of people packed the lawn. In a frenzy, the undulating crowd was screaming, chanting, waving flags and banners, pumping fists in the air, clapping their hands. Parents carried young children awake past their bedtime, on their shoulders; couples and strangers alike hugged one other; and, senior citizens sat

Contributors

Sylvia Beato-Davis is a writer and an educator whose work revolves around the phenomenology of the body, the politics of linguistics, and post-colonial identity; she has been published in the poetry journal *December*. She earned her MFA in poetry and translation from Queens College.

Teronia Campbell (TSC performer) joined College and Community Fellowship in 2009, and participates in both the Academic Support Program and the Theater for Social Change Ensemble. She holds an MA in rehabilitative counseling. Teronia currently works at Odyssey House, a nonprofit helping people recover from addiction.

Regina Bernard-Carreno holds degrees from John Jay College, Columbia University and The Graduate Center. She is an associate professor in the Black and Latino/a Studies Department at Baruch College. Dr. Bernard has published three books about race, education, feminism, and social justice.

Nancy Cardwell is a psychologist and doctoral lecturer in the early childhood education graduate program at the City College of New York with expertise in neuroscience; child development; unconscious

bias reduction; and racially, culturally and linguistically inclusive classroom practices in urban settings. Her research examines the interplay between culturally based knowledge and the professional knowledge of teaching among early childhood teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds. She began her teaching career as an early childhood teacher in central Harlem and later joined the graduate faculty of Bank Street College.

Sandra Cheng is an associate professor of art history at New York City College of Technology. She has served as a faculty leader for City Tech's First Year Learning Community (FYLC) program, and continues to teach FYLC courses.

Grace M. Cho is an associate professor of sociology and anthropology at the College of Staten Island and an alumna of The Graduate Center. She is author of *Tastes Like War* (2021) and *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (2008).

Wanett Clyde is a collections management librarian at the New York City College of Technology. Her research investigates the intersection of fashion studies and Black history.

Lisa Dazzell received her BA in psychology and Africana studies, with a minor in health education and promotion, from Macaulay Honors College at Lehman College. She is currently in a doctoral program in counseling psychology at Iowa State University, where she is studying race, risk, and protective factors in low socioeconomic, predominantly Black neighborhoods, and the stigma associated with mental health in the Black community.

Mery F. Diaz is an associate professor in the Human Services Department at the New York City College of Technology. Her work focuses

on the minoritized, racialized, and gendered school experiences of young people, and social justice issues. She is a long-time faculty participant of City Tech's First-Year Learning Community initiative. She is co-editor of *Narrating Practice with Children and Adolescents* (2019), and is on the editing board of *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*.

Abby Dobson is a sonic conceptual performing artist/composer, activist and scholar. She received a JD from Georgetown University Law Center and a BA from Williams College before accepting her artist's calling. Artist-in-Residence with the African American Policy Forum and NOW-NYC Board President, Abby is passionate about music as a tool for transformative change. Her CD, *Sleeping Beauty: You Are the One You Have Been Waiting On* received rave reviews. She was a 2017 Create Change Fellow with The Laundromat Project and performs with Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter.

Michelle Fine is Distinguished Professor of urban education and psychology at The Graduate Center. Her publications include: *The Changing Landscape of Public Education* (2013), with Michael Fabricant; *Charter Schools and the Corporate Makeover of Public Education* (2012), with Michael Fabricant; *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (2008), with Julio Cammarota; *Muslim-American Youth* (2008), with Selcuk Sirin; *Becoming Gentlemen: Women, Law School, and Institutional Change* (1997), with Lani Guinier and Jane Balin; *Working Method: Research and Social Justice* (2004), with Lois Weis; and her classic *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban High School* (1991).

Bryanna Flores, a mother of two kids, loves reading, writing, and spending time with family. Her favorite genre is mystery. Currently, she is working as a concierge with Emblem Health, and plans to be-

come a paramedic. She is a graduate of Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Selina Fulford (TSC performer), who returned to society in 2009, is currently employed as an MSW coordinator and has worked in the homeless shelter system since 2001. Selina has earned three MAs with College and Community Fellowship's support, and is inspired to further obtain a PhD in social work. She is an advocate for social justice.

Maya Garcia is a writer, poet, and researcher from Minneapolis, Minnesota. She received a BA in English and Puerto Rican and Latino studies from Brooklyn College, and an Advanced Certificate in Labor Studies from The CUNY Graduate Center. Garcia has received fellowships from VONA (Voices of Our Nations Arts), the Watering Hole, and Brooklyn Poets.

Constance H. Gemson was an adjunct lecturer at LaGuardia Community College. Currently, she organizes a writing class for CUNY academics, and is active in the Professional Staff Congress, the union for CUNY faculty and higher education officers.

Karen Goodlad is an associate professor in the Department of Hospitality Management at New York City College of Technology. Specializing in beverage management, she teaches an array of courses preparing students to become leaders in the hospitality industry. Her work as a faculty coordinator of City Tech's First Year Learning Community initiative, as well as a learning communities' teacher, brings high-impact practices into classrooms across the campus.

Yvette Heyliger is a graduate of Hunter College and Queens College, and an award-winning playwright, producing artist, educator and ac-

tivist. Author of *What a Piece of Work is Man! Full-Length Plays for Leading Women*, she has also contributed to various anthologies and recently returned to the stage as a solo artist in her first one-woman show, *Bridge to Baraka*.

Katherine Sweetness Jennings is a self-identified poet. With the support of College and Community Fellowship, Katherine earned a BA in sociology; and an MA in professional studies from New York Theological Seminary. She is also a credentialed alcohol and substance abuse counselor (CASAC), and a member of the Theater for Social Change Ensemble.

Jasmine Kasheboon Khoury is a Palestinian-American from Long Island, New York. She graduated magna cum with a BA in anthropology from the City College of New York. She has researched mental illness and dis/ability amongst Palestinians within the CUNY Pipeline Program and the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship.

Rose M. Kim is an associate professor of sociology at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and a co-editor of *Women on the Role of Public Higher Education: Personal Reflections from CUNY's Graduate Center* (2015) and *Struggle for Ethnic Identity: Narratives by Asian American Professionals* (1999).

Christine Kovic studied at The Graduate Center from 1990–1997, during which she participated in the student strike of 1991 and anti-war protests. She is a professor of anthropology at the University of Houston–Clear Lake, and her current research addresses the intersection of human rights, health, and immigration, with emphasis on the organizing efforts of Latinxs in the United States, Central American migrants crossing Mexico, and the impact of enforcement policies at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Philip Kreniske is an assistant professor at the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Columbia University. Kreniske concentrates on the impact of socioeconomic factors and digital technology on adolescent and young adult development in the United States and sub-Saharan Africa. He earned his PhD from The CUNY Graduate Center, where he created a digital network, and then studied the ways that first-generation and low-income students used the network to generate a system of support in their transition to college.

Shirley Leyro is an assistant professor of criminal justice at Borough of Manhattan Community College. Her research focuses on deportation effects, including the impact of fear resulting from the vulnerability to deportation. She is currently working on publishing the results of a funded research project exploring the impact of deportability on the sense of belonging and membership among CUNY noncitizen students.

Jose Lopez was born and raised in New York City. He received an associate degree in sociology from the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Linda Luu is a PhD student in American studies at New York University and a graduate of Hunter College. Linda organized with the Coalition for the Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter (CRAASH) and is the curator of a CUNY digital history archive collection on the fight for Asian American studies at Hunter.

Katherine McCaffrey is a professor of anthropology at Montclair State University. She studied at The Graduate Center from 1989 to 1999 and participated in the student strike of 1991 and anti-war protests.

Her research interests focus on social inequality and violence, its consequences, and resistance to it in Latin America and the United States. She examined a multi-decade-long movement to evict the U.S. Navy in her book, *Military Power and Popular Protest: the U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (2002). More recently, she has been conducting participatory action field research with new immigrants and refugees in New Jersey.

Denise McFarlan (TSC performer) returned to society in 1993. Since then, with College and Community Fellowship's support, Denise earned her BA. She joined the Theater for Social Change Ensemble in 2006. Denise is hoping to return to school to earn her MA in social work.

Robin McGinty is a PhD candidate (ABD) in geography at The Graduate Center's Earth and Environmental Sciences Program. McGinty's dissertation "*A Labor of Livingness: Oral Histories of Formerly Incarcerated Black Women*" considers a re-imagination of the living experiences of formerly incarcerated Black women and the production of an explicit political subjectivity which attends to the ways of knowing and living the world. McGinty's scholarship and critical practices draw upon the living memory of her own imprisonment.

Charles R. Menzies is a professor of anthropology at the University of British Columbia. His primary research interests are the production of anthropological films, natural resource management (primarily fisheries related), political economy, contemporary First Nations' issues, maritime anthropology and the archaeology of north coast British Columbia. He has conducted field research and has produced films involving north coastal British Columbia, Canada (including archaeological research); Brittany, France; and Donegal, Ireland. He is a member of Gitxaala Nation on BC's north coast and an enrolled mem-

ber of the Tlingit and Haida Tribes of Alaska.

Nina Angela Mercer is a cultural worker. Her plays include *Gutta Beautiful*; *Racing My Girl, Sally*; *Itagua Meji*; *A Road & A Prayer*; *Gypsy and the Bully Door*; and *Mother Wit & Water Born*, a trilogy, including *Between Whispered Blood-Lines*. Recently, Nina collaborated with filmmaker Toshi Sakai on “Invocation for Jose Antonio Aponte,” a video poem. She is co-founder and co-director of Ocean Ana Rising-www.oarinc.org. Nina is a doctoral fellow (Level II) of theater and performance at The Graduate Center. She holds a BA from Howard University, and an MFA from American University. She teaches at Brooklyn College.

Chamutal (Tali) Noimann is associate professor of English at Borough of Manhattan Community College, where she is the founder and coordinator of the Children and Youth Studies AA Program. Her primary areas of research are Victorian Children’s Literature, fantasy, game pedagogy, Neo-Victorianism and Other Worlds theory. Her articles have appeared in various publications, including *College English Association Forum*, *Topic*, *The Washington and Jefferson College Review*, and *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*. Currently, she is an elected member of the Children’s Literature Association’s Ethics committee.

Yolanda Johnson Peterkin (TSC performer) has been working to serve people with criminal justice histories for over a decade. Prior to her current role as chief of housing community activities at the NYC Housing Authority, Yolanda was director of operations for reentry at the Women’s Prison Association. She and her peers published the article titled “Life Capacity Beyond Reentry: A Critical Examination of Racism and Prisoner Reentry Reform in the U.S.” in *Race/Ethnicity Journal: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*. She received her MA in

social work from Hunter College.

Lee Painter-Kim is a nonbinary and queer biracial Korean and White American. A current graduate student and a fellow in the cultural studies program at Claremont Graduate University, they hold a BA in English with a concentration in literature, language, and criticism from Hunter College (2018) and a BFA in Painting & Printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University (2012).

Peggy Lou Pardo was born in Barranquilla, Colombia, and received a BFA from City College. She is a member of the Motion Picture Editors Guild and works in TV and film editing.

Lavelle Porter is an assistant professor of English at New York City College of Technology. He holds a BA in history from Morehouse College, and a PhD in English from The Graduate Center. His writing has appeared in venues such as *The New Inquiry*, *Poetry Foundation*, *JSTOR Daily*, and *Black Perspectives*. He is the author of *The Blackademic Life: Academic Fiction, Higher Education, and the Black Intellectual* (2019).

Mariah Rajah is a native Guyanese who immigrated in the early 2000s. Since graduating from the New York City College of Technology in 2017, she has gone onto becoming a copywriter in the pharma industry, where she has been a leader in helping create entry-level opportunities for BIPOC writers.

Javier Riveros, a child of Colombian immigrants, was raised and still resides in Jamaica, Queens, New York. Currently a first-generation college student at Hunter College, Javier will soon become an elementary school teacher to serve the diverse demographic of children in New York City and use his position to instill ideals of social justice

and equity in today's youth.

Jaime Rodriguez is a proud Puerto Rican from Brooklyn, New York, who is legally blind and has a passion for politics. He is currently an undergraduate at Hunter College, having received his AA in sociology from the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Edna (TSC performer) is the regional director at a not-for-profit mental health agency in New York City. She received an MSW from the Hunter College School of Social Work in January 2009, and her MSW license in December 2014. Edna aspires to open a program that would address the myriad of issues that arise for incarcerated women and their children. She has been a member of College and Community Fellowship's Theater for Social Change and The Writer's Group for over twelve years.

Ashwin Satyanarayana is an associate professor with the Department of Computer Systems Technology at New York City College of Technology, where he serves as a faculty leader for City Tech's First Year Learning Community program. He is also currently serving as chair of the computer systems technology department.

Emily Schnee is professor of English at Kingsborough Community College where she teaches composition and what remains of developmental English. She is a graduate of the urban education doctoral program at The Graduate Center. Her research centers on issues of justice and equity for community college students.

Jennifer Sears is an assistant professor of English at New York City College of Technology, where she is a faculty leader for City Tech's First Year Learning Community (FYLC) program, as well as a dedicated FYLC instructor. Also a fiction writer, she received creative

writing fellowships in 2018 from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Samrah Shoaib is a queer desi femme and a recent graduate of Brooklyn College, where she double-majored in sociology and women's and gender studies. Her research seeks to reimagine the ways in which queer Brown girls can use art as resistance.

Emily Sohmer Tai is an associate professor of history at Queensborough Community College, and a Queensborough representative to the University Faculty Senate.

Cynthia Tobar is an artist, activist-scholar, archivist and oral historian who is passionate about creating interactive, participatory stories documenting social change. An alumna of Hunter College, Cynthia is an assistant professor and head of archives at Bronx Community College, where she creates socially engaged art programming and leads community-based archiving and storytelling projects.

Jason VanOra is a social/personality psychologist and professor of psychology at Kingsborough Community College and The Graduate Center. His research addresses the ways in which narratives can be used to reveal resiliency, identity, and "wisdoms" among persons living within conditions of both marginalization and hope.

Maria F. Vera was born in Cholula, Puebla, Mexico. At 10, she immigrated to the United States and has lived in New York City ever since. While attending the Borough of Manhattan Community College, she was the first woman president of the BMCC Dream Team. After holding different positions at the New York State Youth Leadership Council, the first undocumented, youth-led organization in the state, Maria is their current dream team network coordinator and supports

undocumented high school and college students to organize in their communities. Maria attended John Jay College of Criminal Justice and majored in Latin American and Latinx studies and minored in gender studies.

Vallaire Wallace is a second-year PhD student in English at the University of Virginia. She graduated summa cum laude with a BA in English from Queens College in May 2020.

Alison Wong received her MA in anthropology of food from SOAS University of London, and her BS from Macaulay Honors College at Lehman College. As a writer, she examines her experiences with Chinese-American identity politics and her relationship with her heritage and food. She currently lives in London and New York.