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## OVCS Newsletter February 2016

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The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

February 2016  
Build Community

# OVCS NEWS



## HONORING Community Partners

Founded in 1976 as the Women's Center of Southeastern Connecticut, Safe Futures began as an information and referral service for women entering the workforce.

As demand for the Women's Center's services grew, so did its programs and expertise in the field of domestic violence. In 2012, the Women's Center changed its name to Safe Futures to better reflect those being served by the organization.



Safe Futures and OVCS have a long partnership. We are very pleased to see that their doors have remained open for over fifty years.

## Celebrating 50 Years of Black Power

Black History Month at Connecticut College was kicked off this February with an historic celebration for the spring term of 2016 at a dinner and program on February 1st.

Combining the annual observation of Martin Luther King Day and the beginning of a month of activities and programs to honor and celebrate Black History, an intergenerational crowd of students, staff, faculty and community friends filled the 1941 Room to remember and reflect on both how far we have come and how far we have to go.

This year, 2016 marks the 90th Anniversary of Negro History Week, originally the second week in February, it was created in 1926 by historian Carter G. Woodson. The purpose of the week was to teach the history of the Negro to school children in the public school system. The week was created to be an intentional time of integrating Negro

**Claudia Highbaugh**  
*Dean of Religious & Spiritual Life*

history into school curriculum such that Negro children would have the opportunity to learn about their culture, literature and history. Later in 1976, Negro History Week was expanded to Black History Month, observed in February each year.

In schools, community centers, colleges and universities, topics of Black history are combined with current events, and active issues of community interest and involvement for Black History Month. This year, those attending the opening kick off here at the college listened to an excellent rendition of the Black National Anthem by Jermaine Doris '19, and a moving and inspired spoken word performed by Naomi Jones, a member of Writer's Block Ink. Dinner was offered by Gigi, a plate of comfort food leaving everyone full and happy!

Dr. Jeffery Ogbar, Professor of History at the University of Connecticut, commanded the

# 50 Years of Black Power

*Continued from Front Page*

attention of those gathered, addressing the complexities of the dismissal of Black history. Dr. Ogbar, on this 50th anniversary of the Black Power movement, connected the commitments of young Black activists to the progress of Civil Rights activities of the 1960s. He reminded those gathered that young men and women provided the impetus and motivation for aggressive self-motivation in the Black community of the 1960s urging urban dwellers to vote, speak up for change and demand support for basic community service; health, education and welfare.

The evening ended with the awarding of the annual Martin Luther King Awards. In 2016 commendations were made to; Chakena Sims '16 for student leadership, Jennifer Nival received the staff award, and Professor Mohamed Diagne was awarded for leadership as a member of the faculty.



Year after year, we are invited in this community of scholars and active learners to keep history and active engagement in our minds and living commitments as aspects of good citizenship. All of us are invited to share our experiences, unreported history, significant achievements, and our hopes and dreams for a better, and more just world, as we work, learn and live together.

It is a mandate to learn and repeat history. It is a honor to lift up those who commit to the work of justice and equity. It is a responsibility for all of us to take our education, inspiration and motivation to the streets. We are all asked to live and act as good citizens both in our institution and in our work and everyday life.



Last Wednesday I attended an event in Connecticut College's Spring Series "One Book One Region" which encourages dialogue across our campus, with the New London Community, and with the greater southeastern Connecticut region. This event, entitled "The Long Hard Road to Innocence," featured a talk with Scott Lewis, a man convicted and sentenced to 125 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. It is one thing to read or hear about a story such as this in the news, but it does not have nearly the same impact as having the details unfolded in person from the man who endured this unspeakable and unimaginable experience. Scott Lewis opened his story by beginning with the night he was arrested. He was honest. He admitted that he had not made the best decisions in his life at that point. He told us, "I was not an angel. I put myself in a position where this could happen to me." The court proceedings following his arrest were a whirlwind. Police reports were concealed from the jury. Evidence of a third party likely suspect was buried, leading the jury to conclude that Scott Lewis was guilty. According to Lewis, he watched as the legal system did everything in their capacity to convict him. Once he was put in handcuffs, there was no way the prosecution was going to let him go free. Given the history of our legal system, this gross miscarriage of justice does not come as a huge surprise. However, it was painful to listen as Lewis identified the steps that led to his incarceration, to know that he was targeted by the police.

Once in jail, Lewis devoted every single day to learning about the legal system. He explained to us that although while he was physically in jail, his mind was not. He would tell his children that "daddy's

# WHO IS SCOTT LEWIS

*Leela Riesz '16*

just working 24 hours a day now." He told us that he would have a recurring dream in which he was attacked by snakes. This is what it felt to like to be framed for a crime he did not commit and to feel the stares of his fellow convicts who believed he would fail without the help of a lawyer. Determined to be exonerated, Lewis suppressed his anger and fear. He remained composed, even with the knowledge that racism had worked so easily in this case, enabling the state to convict him. Lewis' ability to carry forth and not give up on the system that had effectively robbed him of 20 years of his life is unfathomable. As he spoke, he was exceptionally humble about his own accomplishments. It was not until he showed the court system that he was capable of representing himself, that he gained the legal support he needed

**"My body was in jail, but my mind was not"**

to win. Scott Lewis' story is powerful because it uncovers the mechanisms of corruption and racism that pervade our legal system. It offers us just a small glimpse at the level of perseverance and courage

that it took this man to see justice served and to essentially save his own life. Unfortunately, Scott Lewis' story is one of many in which an individual was wrongly incarcerated. According to Matt Ferner in the Huffington Post, in 2015, 149 people were cleared for crimes that they did not commit. This is more than any other year in history. Scott Lewis' story should not be shoved under the rug and forgotten. Let it be another lesson that compels us to name these and other injustices, keep the conversation going, and make more just policies and systems.

**This event was co-sponsored by the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund.**





Protesters outside of the reception for A Wider Bridge. Photo by Twitter user @2wheels4justice.

## #Cancel Pinkwashing and Imperialist Homonationalism: Creating Change Conference

**Chloe Jones '15, AmeriCorps VISTA**

From January 20th to the 24th, the Hilton Chicago was host to the annual Creating Change Conference. The Conference was coordinated by the National LGBTQ Task Force, and this year's Creating Change saw record attendance with over 5,000 people participating throughout long weekend. Workshops ranged from issues of racial justice, sexuality, community organizing, and intersectionality. I was lucky enough to be able to attend the conference with current Connecticut College LGBTQ Center coordinators Courtenay Barton '16 and Justin Mendillo '17. Also in attendance were recent CC alumni Karina Hernandez '14 and Anthony Sis '13.

Starting off the conference was an all-day racial justice institute, leading up to the opening plenary session that night. The opening plenary session was entitled "Black Feminism and the Movement for Black Lives," and featured speakers and famous activists Barbara Smith, Reina Gossett, and Charlene Carruthers. The remaining days of the conference were structured around workshops, networking opportunities and caucuses. These workshops included "Ferguson and the Black Lives Matter Movement One Year Later," "How to Better Serve Homeless Youth," and "Disrupting Heteronormativity in K-12 Classrooms." While the educational and insightful workshops were very well structured and open-minded, the scene changed when a series of events sparked a protest at Creating Change on Friday, January 22nd.

Some backstory on this: the National LGBTQ Task Force released the preliminary agenda for Creating Change, including a reception for Pro-Israel group A Wider Bridge. This group has long been criticized by Jewish Voice for Peace and Black Lives Matter Chicago for pinkwashing, as the group deflects or ignores abuses of human rights and focuses

primarily on affirmative stories of LGBTQ communities and experiences in Israel. Due to backlash from many conference participants, the reception was cancelled. A similar situation arose after the Task Force accepted a proposal from ICS (U.S. Immigration and Customs) to hold an organizing session at Creating Change. This event was also cancelled, and a formal apology was issued by the Task Force both online and at the opening plenary session; however, the reception for A Wider Bridge was reinstated entirely under the radar, without any acknowledgement or apology.

The crowd response occurred on Friday night, outside of the reception for A Wider Bridge, over 200 activists mobilized and occupied the space, holding signs with messages such as "No Pride in Apartheid," "No Queer Liberation Without Decolonization." Protesters also chanted "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." The hashtag #CancelPinkwashing overwhelmed the #CC16 Twitter feed. The Hilton Chicago called the police, and the protest was broken up. The executive director of the Task Force, Rea Carey, issued a statement concerning the events, stating "I want to make this crystal clear: the National LGBTQ Task Force wholeheartedly condemns anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic statements made at any Task Force event including our Creating Change Conference. It is unacceptable." She did not acknowledge that the only act of violence was done to a protester by a reception attendee. In fact, the response of the Task Force only further incited pinkwashing and imperialist homonationalism.

There was a lot to be learned from this year's Creating Change Conference in Chicago. There were great workshops run by incredible activists who truly had one of a kind insights on community organizing. But the greatest learning moment came in the form of seeing institutionalized pinkwashing in action, and seeing a community of activists standing up to ensure that everyone's voice could be heard.

# One Book, One Region Series

leading up to April 4 presentation of JUST MERCY by Attorney Bryan Stevenson

*These events are co-sponsored by One Book, One Region, the Frank Loomis Palmer Fund, the Kitchings Family Foundation  
Connecticut College and the Libraries of Southeastern CT*

## Contradictions: The Economic and Social Cost of Drug Dealing and Policing in a Small Black Town

BLAUSTEIN HUMANITIES CENTER ROOM 210  
TUESDAY, FEB. 23; 4 P.M.

## Meet Stanley Nelson, Director of 'The Black Panthers'

ERNST COMMON ROOM | CHARLES CHU ROOM  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24; 11:50 OR 4:30

## An Evening With Marilyn Nelson: Emmet Till in Words and Pictures

GROTON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
TUESDAY, MARCH 8; 7-9 P.M.

Award winning poet Marilyn Nelson will read from her acclaimed book, [A Wreath for Emmett Till](#). The reading will be followed by a screening of the film, "The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till."

## Film Screening: 'The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution'

BLAUSTEIN ROOM 210  
TUESDAY, FEB. 23; 7 P.M.

## Journey to Life After Prison

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF NEW LONDON  
SATURDAY, FEB. 27; 1-3 P.M.

## Judy Dworkin Performance Project

CHARLES CHU ROOM  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9; 4:30 P.M.

Judy Dworkin Performance Project is a not-for-profit organization of professional artists who work in prisons.

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## Incarceration: Meet the Authors

BLAUSTEIN, HOOD DINING ROOM  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30; 11:50 A.M.-1 P.M.

Ana Campos Holland is an associate professor of sociology at Connecticut College and editor of "Fragile Fathers," a manuscript that features the lives of 45 fathers (and 12 mothers for comparison) who struggle to practice parenthood while balancing the demands of family life, the criminal lifestyle and the criminal justice system. Jen Manion is associate professor of history at Connecticut College and author of "Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America," which shows the connections among the establishment of democracy, the abolition of slavery and the expansion of the penal state, and the implications for racialized and gendered ideologies of freedom, resistance and dependency.



## Indigenous Scholars Lecture

BLAUSTEIN, HOOD DINING ROOM  
THURSDAY, MARCH 31; 4:30 P.M.

Audra Simpson, associate professor of anthropology at Columbia University, and Glen Coulthard, assistant professor in the First Nations Studies Program and the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia, are the current "it" scholars in Native American, Indigenous Studies, both winning multiple awards and accolades for their recent books, "Mohawk Interruptus" and "Red Skin, White Masks," respectively.

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## One Book One Region Book Discussion: 'Just Mercy'

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF NEW LONDON  
SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2pm-3pm

Join attorney Lonnie Braxton and B. Afeni McNeely Cobham, Associate Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion at Connecticut College