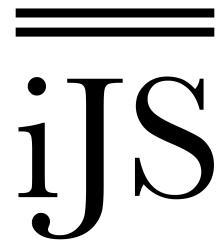




REIMAGINE JUSTICE

 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

 Columbia Law School

The logo for the Initiative for a Just Society (iJS), consisting of the lowercase letters "i" and "J" followed by the uppercase letter "S". The "i" and "J" are connected at the top, and the "S" is positioned to the right. Above the letters are two horizontal lines.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 16, 2021

The [Initiative for a Just Society](#) (IJS) at the Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought and the [Square One Project](#) at the Columbia Justice Lab announce a new partnership: the Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy Project (RJAD).

In collaboration with partner organizations and institutions, this three-year, multidisciplinary project will design, develop, and test a prototype upper-level Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy curriculum. It will include a portfolio of academic and clinical courses and experiential learning opportunities, including online teaching resources, videos and webinars, and MOOCs (“massive open online courses”).

Spanning the humanities, the arts, the social sciences, and public policy and law, the RJAD curriculum will interrogate education from many lenses - such as access, legitimacy, functionality, equity, influence, and hegemony - and will connect students with the research, narrative, and local site work of the Columbia Justice Lab’s Square One Project; and with the practice-oriented justice engagement and abolition democracy work at the Initiative for a Just Society. The curriculum will be available for adoption, adaptation, and use in universities and colleges, prisons and jails, and community settings across the nation.

“There is nothing more urgent and important today than to reorient our institutions of higher education to the task of achieving racial justice and a just society,” said Bernard E. Harcourt, Isidor and Seville Sulzbacher Professor of Law and Professor of Political Science at Columbia University, who is co-leading the project with Bruce Western, Bryce Professor of Sociology and Social Justice at Columbia University. “This task was the ambition that W.E.B. Du Bois set forth with his idea of ‘abolition democracy’ and it rings as true today as it did a century ago.”

“The road to racial justice in America runs through the police and prisons, but it is about much more than just ending mass incarceration,” said Western. “It’s about what we build in its place, including true educational equity. The Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy Project will bring together community representatives, students, and faculty to interrogate these questions.”

Professors Harcourt and Western and other Square One and IJS staff will work closely with a unique national advisory board that brings together academic and community leaders from organizations and institutions around the country. The following advisory board members will

contribute to the development, implementation, and broad dissemination of the RJAD project and curriculum:

- Reverend Vivian D. Nixon is the Executive Director of College & Community Fellowship (CCF), an organization that helps women whose lives have been impacted by criminal and corrections systems to access and complete college. She spent eleven years yoked to corrections systems before joining CCF to complete her theological education, a B.A. at Empire College, and an M.F.A. at Columbia School of the Arts. Inquiry into the function of knowledge as power is a consistent theme in Vivian's work. She imagines justice as a demand that equity, inclusion, capacity, and visibility exist for all people across all systems. The John Jay Medal for Justice and fellowships at Aspen Institute Ascend, Open Society Foundations, and Pen America are distinctions she appreciates deeply. Vivian is writing a memoir and other projects that expand the narrative of performing *Black Girl Magic* amid structural oppression.
- Lorraine C. Taylor is Executive Director of the Juvenile Justice Institute, located in the Department of Criminal Justice at North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina. In this role, Lorraine leads efforts to influence juvenile justice policy and practice by providing and supporting quality research, information, and technical assistance to youth system actors. Her work is guided by a "ecological systems" approach that evaluates how institutional, community, and individual level factors influence youth outcomes. She has a B.S. from Howard University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Virginia.
- Barbara L. Jones is the Community Dispute Resolution Specialist and Faculty Instructor for the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies Program at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Barbara is a lifelong community activist, organizer, restorative justice practitioner, and youth violence prevention advocate and works in a variety of settings in the Detroit-Metro area. She holds a B.S. in Mass Communications from Rochester College, and both an M.A. in Conflict/Dispute Resolution and a Graduate Certificate in Peace and Security Studies from Wayne State University.
- Pastor Michael McBride (known as "Pastor Mike") is a native of the Bay Area and has been active in ministry for over 20 years. Throughout the years, his commitment to holistic ministry can be seen through his leadership roles in both the church and community organizations. In March 2012, he became the National Director for Urban Strategies/LIVE FREE Campaign with the Faith in Action Network, a campaign led by hundreds of faith congregations throughout the United States committed to addressing gun violence and mass incarceration of young people of color. A graduate of Duke University's Divinity School, with an emphasis in Ethics and Public Policy, Pastor Mike planted The Way Christian Center in West Berkeley, California, where he presently serves as the Lead Pastor.
- Jason Seals is an African-centered educator, carrying the tradition of activist-intellectual to address critical systemic issues and empower individuals for personal and social transformation. An Oakland native, Jason has over two decades of experience serving

his community locally, nationally, and globally as an educator, thought leader, speaker, and change agent. While completing his B.A. in Sociology at San Jose State University, Jason began his career in youth development serving in multiple roles across the nonprofit, mental health, and juvenile justice sectors. After obtaining his master's in Africana Studies from the University of Albany, he leveraged his love for transformational educational practices and Africana studies in the classroom, teaching ethnic studies and manhood development courses at multiple high schools, colleges, and universities across the Bay Area. Jason earned his M.Ed. in Counseling Psychology from the University of San Francisco. He currently serves as the Chair of Ethnic Studies and Professor of African American Studies at Merritt College in Oakland, California.

The Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy Project is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation as part of their [Just Futures Initiative](#), which aims to advance a more democratic society. This initiative aims to fund large-scale endeavors that extend purposefully beyond academic departments to neighborhoods, cities, and entire geographic regions, transforming discourse into action with social, cultural, and economic impact.

RJAD will be hiring a Curriculum Coordinator, two Racial Justice Fellows, a Racial Justice Artist in Residence, a Racial Justice Writer in Residence, a Legal Practitioner in Residence, a Legal Scholar in Residence, and a Postdoctoral Researcher. The IJS is seeking people who have written and worked in the area of Abolition Democracy. The following positions are posted and will be open until filled; the remaining positions will be posted as they become available.

- Curriculum Coordinator: <https://pa334.peopleadmin.com/postings/7012>
- Practitioner in Residence (IJS/Columbia Law): <https://pa334.peopleadmin.com/postings/6933>
- Scholar in Residence (IJS/Columbia Law): <https://pa334.peopleadmin.com/postings/6936>
- Postdoctoral Research Scholar (SQ1): <https://pa334.peopleadmin.com/postings/7190>
- Racial Justice Fellow (2 positions): Posting to come
- Artist in Residence (IJS/Columbia Law): Posting to come

For more information, please visit

<https://cccct.law.columbia.edu/content/racial-justice-and-abolition-democracy-project>.

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### **About the Initiative for a Just Society**

*The Initiative for a Just Society at the Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought aims to envision and work toward a society of equal citizens, free from racial supremacy and corrosive wealth accumulation, in which all human beings can flourish. The IJS engages in practical interventions, including litigation on the death penalty, for protest rights, and against racial injustice, and fosters critical conversations on abolition democracy. Learn more about the IJS at [cccct.law.columbia.edu/content/initiative-just-society](https://cccct.law.columbia.edu/content/initiative-just-society).*

### **About the Square One Project**

*The Square One Project at the Columbia Justice Lab aims to reimagine justice and create a pathway for reckoning in our country. Square One incubates new thinking on responses to racism, poverty*

*and violence; promotes equitable safety and community thriving; and advances narrative and cultural change. Learn more about the Square One Project at [squareonejustice.org](https://squareonejustice.org).*