



# PRISON PROFITS

**Who Pays The Price?**

SP  
UP



**It costs almost \$70,000 to incarcerate one person for one year in New York state.**

**Why does it cost so much to keep people in prisons and jails?**

**The New York City government spent \$3.7 billion on jails and prisons in 2017.**

**Could this money be used differently? Who decides?**

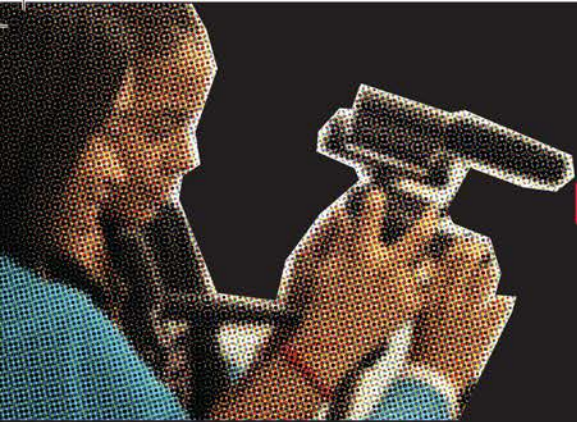
In December 2018, CUP collaborated with Teaching Artist Marianna Olinger and students from the Bushwick Leaders' High School to understand the cost of prison, who profits from it, and who pays for it. To investigate, students used art to create maps of the prison system, surveyed community members, and interviewed key stakeholders working on the issue. This booklet is a guide to what students learned about the true cost of prisons and jails.

**The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world.**

**Who profits from prisons and jails? Where does the money come from?**







## WHAT IS MASS INCARCERATION?

*“Mass incarceration basically just means we put so many people in prison in this country that it’s gotten out of control... 2.2 million are in prisons and jails around the country. That is a lot of people and that has never happened before in the history of this country.”*

*“One of the things that contributes to [mass incarceration] is the fact that there are a lot of private companies that run prisons, and [provide services] like prisoner transport companies, or provide food in prisons, telephones in prisons.”*



— Eli Hager, Staff Writer,  
The Marshall Project



*“The jails are run by the City, whereas prisons are run by New York State, so there’s two separate budgets. The NYC Department of Corrections alone has a budget of about **\$1.4 billion** a year, and that’s just what goes through the Department.”*

— Tammy Gamerman,  
Director of Budget Research,  
New York City Comptroller’s Office

*“The **Prison Industrial Complex** is a term ... that means a lot of people are profiting off of the prison system. It is not just that people are in prison because they have committed crimes and because they are bad people, it’s also because there is this whole web of people and companies that are profiting off of the fact that so many people get arrested and put in prison.”*

— Eli Hager

## WHY IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

*“A lot of times when we talk about people who are incarcerated, we call them felons or inmates. We lead with what happened to them or what they did ... When we call people prisoners or convicts, they’re no longer people, they’re what happened to them or what they did. So we like to use what we call people-first language.”*

— Carlos Quintana, Director of College Access,  
Prisoner Reentry Institute



Though the U.S. abolished slavery for free people, the **13th Amendment** made it possible for people in prison to be forced to work without pay.

In some states, people in prison earn as little as 60 cents per hour for their work. In many cases their salary is not enough to pay for the basic services and supplies they need in prison.

*"Wherever you see something that says Corcraft on it, that was made in a New York State prison by people who are making less than minimum wage... At phone companies, sometimes the people who are answering your phones may be in a prison and they're getting paid a dollar an hour maybe... The reality is that this is part of the industry [...]"*

— Carlos Quintana



In the fall of 2018, BLHS students surveyed community members in Bushwick, Brooklyn about the cost of prisons and jails.

When asked how much people in prison should get paid for their labor, **64%** of our respondents said people should be paid minimum wage.

**OUR SURVEY**

**The 13th Amendment**  
**The 13th Amendment**  
to the Constitution  
of the United States

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.

*"You have more black people incarcerated right now than were in slavery in 1865... One in three black men have either been incarcerated or under community supervision [on] parole or probation."*

— Steven Pacheco,  
Prisoner Reentry Institute





# WHO PROFITS FROM PRISONS & JAILS?



*"Lots of different private companies, like McDonald's or Microsoft have benefited from prison labor at some point. You have construction companies, others that do prisoner transportation, and all kinds of things inside prisons... Also, there is the government. Although they spend so much money on people in prisons, there is a lot of incentive to build prisons because they create jobs for prison guards - or that is the argument."*

— Eli Hager

**In 2018, the Corrections Accountability Project exposed 3,100 companies that profit off the prison system in the U.S.**

*"Most of the budget [for New York City's jails] funds the employees. There are about 10,000 what we call 'uniformed' employees, the correction officers, and then there's another 2,000 we call 'civilian' employees, administrative staff. That's about 85% of the budget, just funding the number of people who work there."*

— Tammy Gamerman



*"[In New York] J-Pay manages money transfers. If you want to send money into somebody's commissary account or their funds in prison, you use J-Pay and pay them a fee for that. J-Pay in New York State takes \$4 if you send \$10. So if I want to send \$10 to somebody in prison, \$6 gets there."*

*"When you leave prison, [J-Pay] will issue you a debit card, your release card, with the remainder of your money on it. You're charged for using it, you're charged for not using it, you're charged if you have to sign, you're charged if you lose it, you're charged if you want to speed up delivery... Everything that you do or don't do costs money on it."*



Luke Noel, Program Associate, Corrections Accountability Project

## OUR SURVEY

**95%** of the people we surveyed for this project said they believe people in prison should not have to pay to use the phone. If they have to pay, **96%** said people in prison should pay less or the same we pay for goods inside prison.

In reality, products sold inside prisons cost much more than outside, mostly due to fees charged by private companies.





## WHY IS IT THIS WAY?

### RACISM

*“A lot more black and brown people are incarcerated for the same offenses as there are white people and that is because there is racial bias at every stage of the system. At the stage of police officers making arrests... but also at the stage of judges making decisions and prosecutors making decisions there is a lot of bias. Basically every step along the way there is a lot of unfairness based on race built into the system.”*

— Eli Hager

### LENGTHY SENTENCES

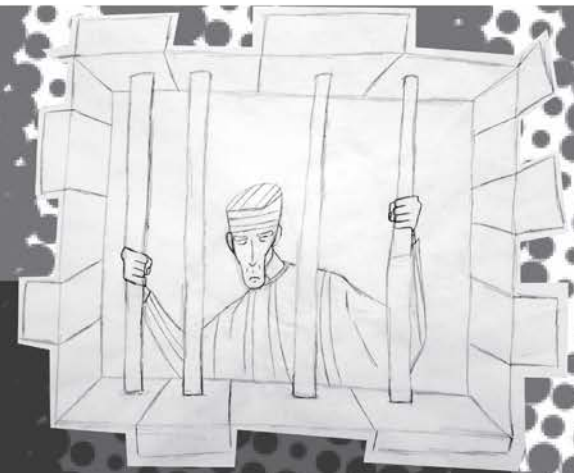
*“There are a lot of people who have committed a crime, but do they deserve to be in prison their entire lives? You have some people who commit a crime at age of 15 and they’ll go to prison for life. That doesn’t really seem fair and young people especially should get a second chance at living their lives.”*

— Eli Hager

### COMPANIES PROFITING FROM PRISON

*“The underlying reason that mass incarceration exists is because of racism and inequality... If we simply erase the profit motive that doesn’t entirely fix the problem. But it certainly is a barrier that prevents any change from happening.”*

— Luke Noel



LOCKED UP  
FOR LIFE






# HOW CAN IT BE CHANGED?

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

"If somebody does something that is wrong, there are alternative ways to make justice. In Restorative Justice, offenders can meet with victims, they can talk about why what they did was wrong, they can do services to the community to pay back for what they did instead of having just pure punishment as a solution or sending someone to jail for a long time." — Eli Hager



2.3 million people  
incarcerated in  
U.S. prisons  
and jails

## REDUCE SENTENCES AND TREAT PEOPLE IN PRISON HUMANELY

"Some countries do not send people to prison for very long time, but even when that happens, people are treated well. They have opportunity to go outside, to study, to work, to access entertainment and have a healing time while in prison, so they can get rehabilitated." — Eli Hager

## MAKE SERVICES IN PRISON FREE

In 2018, the New York City Council passed a bill that made phone calls out of city jails free, starting in 2019. It is the first time that such a bill has passed in the U.S. and will save communities in New York City over \$10 million a year.

WHAT'S NEXT?

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

## DIVEST FROM COMPANIES THAT PROFIT FROM PRISON

"Divestment is the opposite of investing. The idea is that you can take money away from companies profiting for the P.I.C. [For example,] plenty of people have retirement plans... Vanguard, which is one of the biggest providers of retirement investment plans in the U.S., owns 14% of the biggest private prison operators. New York City, New York State, and recently Columbia University, also divested from companies who were profiting from prisons after pressure from students and the civil society."

—Luke Noel

Activism Matters

SUPPORTIVE

OUR SURVEY

95% of people surveyed preferred that the government invest in social programs to reduce the prison population, rather than build more prisons.

CHANGE THE SYSTEM

MORE COMMUNITY LESS PRISONS



# WHAT STUDENTS SAY

*“The Prison Industrial Complex is a complicated system due to (people’s) treatment and unfairness. You have to pay a lot to keep people in prison.”*

— Lisa Robles,  
Bushwick Leaders’ student

*“I feel like big business companies should not take advantage of the prison industrial complex, just because products can be made at a cheap cost. (People in prison) should get minimum wages to do their jobs.”*

— Marquise Horne  
Bushwick Leaders’ student

# GET INVOLVED

**EDUCATE YOURSELF:** Read articles on the *Marshall Project*, or other institutions who research the prison system. You can also write to people in prison. Often times, people in prison don’t get to tell their stories.

**VOTE:** Voting is really important. For example, you can vote for your local prosecutor. If you think s/he’s doing a bad job or putting too many people in jail, you can vote for somebody else.

**ENGAGE:** Connect to organizations that provide support for people in prison and work to make change.

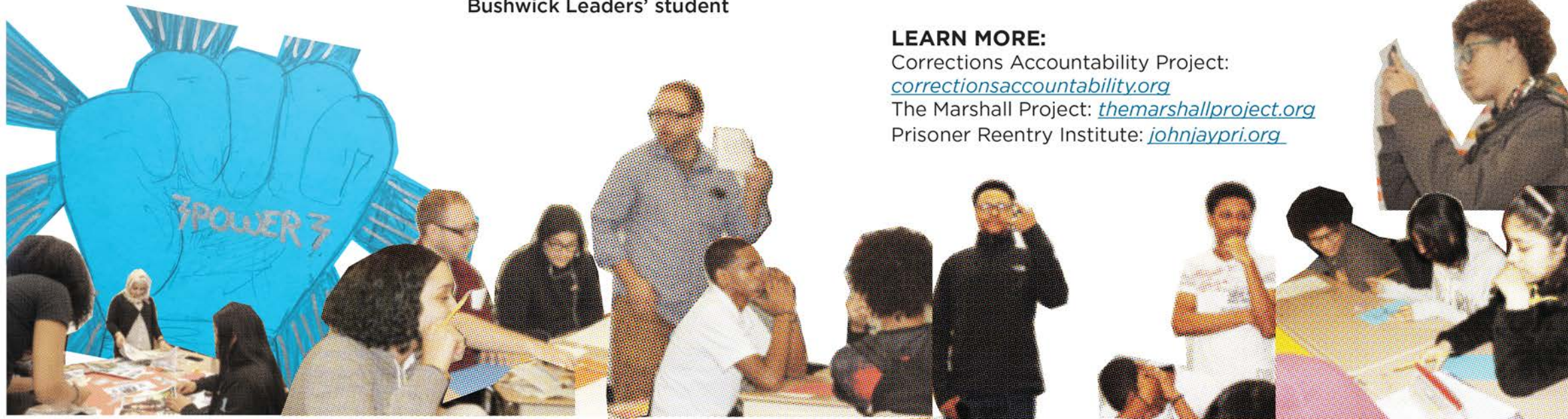
## LEARN MORE:

Corrections Accountability Project:

[correctionsaccountability.org](http://correctionsaccountability.org)

The Marshall Project: [themarshallproject.org](http://themarshallproject.org)

Prisoner Reentry Institute: [johnjaypri.org](http://johnjaypri.org)



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The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities.

**City Studies** are CUP's project-based, in-class and afterschool programs that use design and art as tools to research the city. To learn more, visit [welcometoCUP.org](http://welcometoCUP.org).

**Bushwick Leaders' High School for Academic Excellence** will prepare ninth through twelfth grade students from the Bushwick Community, regardless of prior academic performance, to become active leaders with an emphasis on academics, college preparation, and technology. To learn more, visit [bushwickleaders.org](http://bushwickleaders.org).

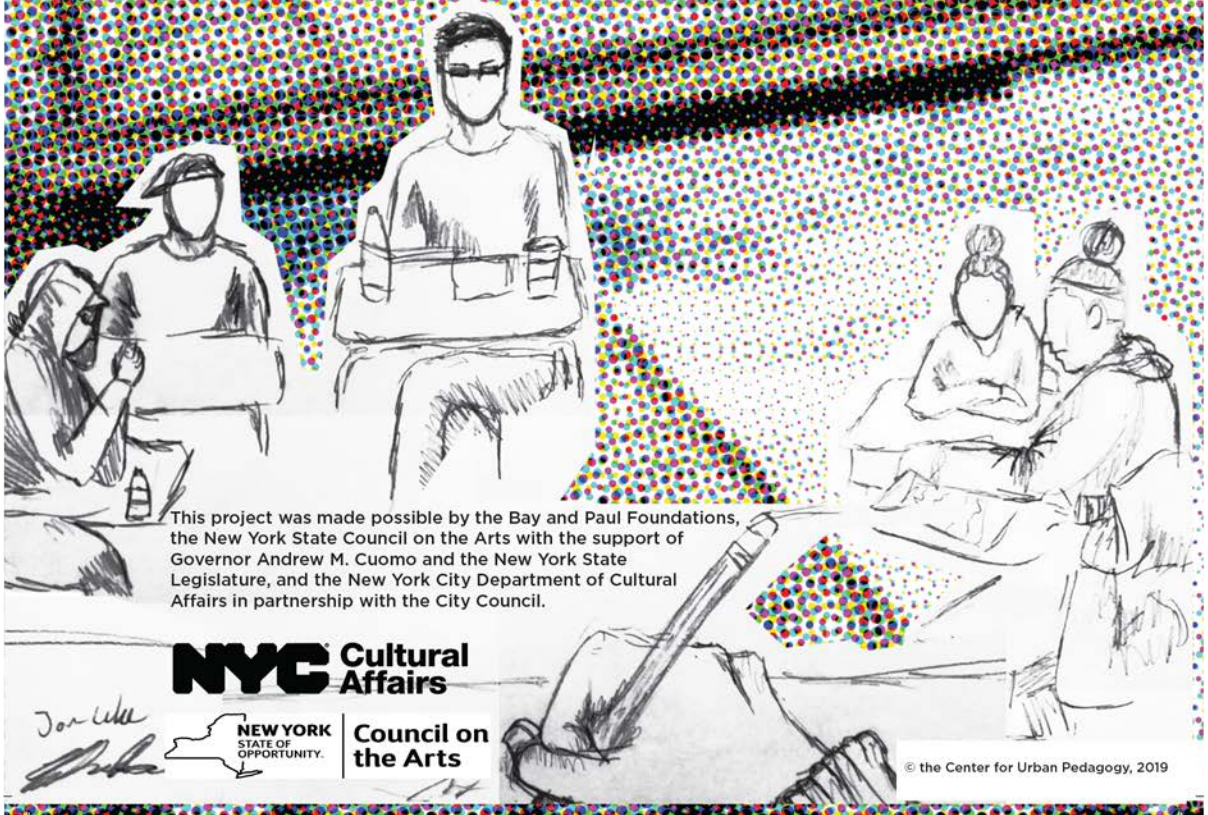
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**NYC Cultural Affairs**

*Jon Wike*  
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**Council on the Arts**