

## Define '09 event tackles obstacles of going green

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**Published:** Saturday, October 3, 2009

**Updated:** Saturday, October 3, 2009

The latest event in the University's Define '09 series featured environmental justice leader Majora Carter, the founder of Sustainable South Bronx, speaking on her projects and contributions to her neighborhood and other environmental programs. The event was hosted by The Center for Civic Engagement and senior Laura Comer, a member of Progressive Students Union and Students for a Greener Hofstra, introduced Carter.

Her presentation involved a slide show including pictures of her family life and the neighborhood she grew up in, connecting herself to the importance of her work. "Our society treated the environment like it was separate from us; it is important to have a connection," she said, "... to find so many young people who believe this is something to pay attention to is inspiring."

Progressive Students Union Vice President and sophomore Amanda Beneway was very excited to speak with Carter after the event at the University Club. "Majora was inspirational. She's done so much great work but is still so down to Earth. Her story was really interesting and gave everyone hope that we can overcome all the giant obstacles on our way to a more sustainable future," she said.

Carter was not interested in environmental issues her entire life, and it was not her focus in college, however, she became interested when she moved back home and became aware of the issues that were affecting her neighborhood. She saw the deterioration of the Bronx and found that one of the main causes was that the South Bronx held about 40 percent of New York City's waste. "Race and class is a fierce indicator of quality of environment... I wanted to be a part of any change that would let my community breathe," she explained.

Her first project turned an illegal dump into a park in 2006, where later that year she got married. The accomplishment was empowering for Carter; "we were a community that thought no good could come from it." Soon she realized though that the establishment of parks was not nearly enough. The city had been bringing in outside workers to do the restoration work, which made little to no sense to Carter who understood the high unemployment faced in her area. She then created Bronx Environment Stewardship Training, a program in which Bronx residents would learn how to perform these new jobs.

The benefits of these programs were immediately visible to the community. The parks served as horticultural therapy, and there was even crime prevention through environmental design. Carter commented on the success of her efforts and why she has not further pursued political office and said, "I had this ridiculous idea that you had to change things from the inside of a political system, but we've been more successful getting legislation passed being on the outside."

Currently the Major Carter Group is working on their future Green Way projects and the Make it Right housing program, helping Northeastern North Carolina and Elizabeth State University develop environmental programs, and starting investment strategies for inner cities and even rural areas to develop their sustainability. Carter believes that these efforts have proven "the American spirit of ingenuity is not dead."

She concluded with the idea that change can happen; people just have to want it. "Obama does not just mean the guy in the White House, it's also an acronym: Officially Behaving As Magnificent Americans."



Caity Gilvary/The Chronicle

Environment Justice Leader Majora Carter spoke to students for a Define '09 event dedicated to progressive reform and community building methods.



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