

TAKE ACTION

Using Art and Media for Advocacy and Education

Using various kinds of art and media can support both the education and advocacy sides of your campaign. A live performance can become a big community event that brings new people in and even attracts press attention. Video clips can stimulate discussion and transport a community to a world they can't otherwise inhabit. Art exhibits or installations can give people space to learn or be moved on their own time. Here are some specific suggestions to get you started:

- *Mariposa and the Saint* (<http://www.juliasteeleallen.com/portfolio/mariposa/>) is a 45-minute, two-person play based on letters from a woman (Mariposa) held in solitary confinement. Rabbi Michael Lezak brought the play to his community in the Bay Area, where it was well-attended. The national tour for this production, coordinated by NRCAT, ran from September 2015 through June 2016. Another example is Judith Sloan's one-woman show *YO MISS!* (<http://www.earsay.org/projects/performance/>) Look for

similar productions that are traveling to your community or could be brought in.

- If no play is available, consider staging a reading yourself. *If the SHU Fits*, produced by NRCAT from the testimony of people held in solitary, is a 21-page script available at <http://www.nrcat.org/storage/documents/if-the-shu-fits-script.pdf>. It can be read in a meeting by simply going around the room and letting each person read a part, or could be rehearsed for a formal reading, or could be staged as a performance.

- NRCAT has built a full-size model of a solitary cell, which is available to be transported around the country and assembled as an interactive art exhibit. Visit <http://nrcat.org/torture-in-us-prisons/replica-shu-cell> for more details. (Be advised that transport and assembly of the cell can cost \$5,000 or more.)

ABOUT NRCAT

NRCAT, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, was founded in 2006 as a response to the revelations about torture in the US military prison at Abu Ghraib, Iraq. T'ruah was a founding organization and remains an active partner. Since then, NRCAT has expanded its mandate to include torture in US prisons, jails, and other sites of detention, specifically advocacy to end the use of solitary confinement. Over 320 organizations, representing Evangelical Christians, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, mainline Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, Bahá'ís, and Buddhists, are part of NRCAT.

Photo courtesy of NRCAT



• A simpler version of the replica cell is to conduct a “chalk-in.” Using chalk on a sidewalk or parking lot, or tape on a floor, mark out a box six feet by nine. This is approximately the size of most solitary cells. You can invite students or volunteers to sit in it, or put up a simple explanatory sign and let people have their own experience with it as they walk by.

• Using video is a great way to start a conversation or bring a class deeper into a world they otherwise wouldn’t have access to, or bringing a voice into the classroom from behind bars. Both fiction and nonfiction can be appropriate. We have found that screening a full-length movie or documentary is challenging in this context; unless the filmmaker is on hand to take questions afterwards, generally people have used up their attention span and are ready to leave when the film is over. Showing a series of short clips, or at most one episode of a television show, can allow time for a rich conversation. Following is a list of clips you may find useful:

- *Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System*⁵¹³ (2 min.)—animated documentary from BeyondBars.org and Brave New Films. First in a series of shorts.
- *Fear of a Brown Planet: comedian Aamer Rahman on “Reverse Racism”*⁵¹⁴ (3 min.)—brief history of white supremacy.
- *Rev. Deborah Johnson: At the Heart of Changing Systems and Structures*⁵¹⁵ (7 min.)
- *Incarcerated People Speak*⁵¹⁶: A list of 16 short clips curated by the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation.
- *Why Solitary Confinement is Modern-Day Torture*⁵¹⁷ (5 min.)—animated op-ed making the case for why solitary is torture.
- *Slavery to Mass Incarceration*⁵¹⁸ (6 min.)—by Equal Justice Initiative.
- *Breaking Down the Box*⁵¹⁹—a 40 minute documentary about ending solitary confinement, produced by NRCAT.
- *How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race*⁵²⁰ (12 min.)—TED talk by Jay Smooth.

Available on YouTube⁵⁰⁹:

- *I Am Not Black, You Are Not White*⁵¹⁰ (4 min.)—first-person narrative about race as a social construct.
- *The Future of Race in America: Michelle Alexander at TEDxColumbus*⁵¹¹ (24 min.)
- *Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity. Joy DeGruy, A Trip to the Grocery Store*⁵¹² (4 min.)—first-person narrative about being treated differently due to race.

Comedian John Oliver, on his comedy/news show “Last Week Tonight,” has covered a series of topics related to mass incarceration, where he explains clearly the issues at hand:

- Prison:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Pz3syET3DY
- Prisoner Reentry:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJtYRxH5G2k>

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510 <http://www.globetoday.com/watch-the-video-thats-taking-the-world-by-storm-today-this-will-leave-you-questioning-everything/>

511 www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6H-Mz6hgw

512 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTvU7uUgjUI>

513 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGFdIEZRH5k>

514 www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw_mRaIHb-M

515 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijiFh-NgWfl>

516 <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLd1OmLQbUbMtE9o4QTNs9CbxM25eR0RYI>

517 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9xeIRpLUdc>

518 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4e_djVSag4

519 <http://www.nrcat.org/torture-in-us-prisons/breaking-down-the-box>

520 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbdxeFcQtaU>

- Mandatory Minimums:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDVmldTurqk>
- Municipal Fines:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UjpmT5noto>
- Police Militarization:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUdHIatS36A>
- Civil Forfeiture:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kEpZWGgJks>
- Bail:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS5mwymTIJU>
- Public defenders:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USkEzLuzmZ4>

Non-video sources for the stories of incarcerated people or their families:

- *Between the Bars: Human Stories from Prison:*
<https://betweenthebars.org/>
- *My Life Now: Stories from Young People with Parents in Prison:*
<https://www.shineforkids.org.au/mylifenow/>
- *Hell is a Very Small Place*—stories from people held in solitary, published by SolitaryWatch.

The Dhamma Brothers (<http://www.dhammabrothers.com/>)—Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari, a prison chaplain in Massachusetts, finds this documentary exceptionally useful with both incarcerated people and free people interested in learning more about incarceration. It tells the story of a Vipassana silent meditation retreat conducted inside Alabama’s maximum security prison for the people incarcerated there. With a run time of 75 minutes, it provides time afterwards for discussion and follow-up.

The following two documentaries, though a little long to be followed by much discussion, provide more in-depth looks at two aspects of mass incarceration:

- *The House I Live In* (2012, 108 min.) examines the War on Drugs and its implications for human rights. Available on NetFlix.
- *Herman’s House* (2012, 80 min.) tells the story of Herman Wallace, one of the “Angola Three”—a black man held in solitary confinement in Louisiana’s Angola Prison for 41 years—and Jackie Sumell, a white woman who began a correspondence with Herman and eventually designed a scale model of his dream house. Herman was released from prison on October 1, 2013 and died three days later of liver cancer.

