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# 'The Hole' Exposed: Voices on Solitary Confinement in the American Prison System

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

**‘The Hole’ Exposed:  
Voices on Solitary Confinement in the American Prison  
System**

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2014

Honors Thesis

Department of Anthropology

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## **Abstract**

Solitary confinement, as practiced within the United States penal system, is a form of imprisonment that is rarely studied within the field of anthropology due to the nature of isolated prisoners as highly inaccessible subjects. Details about the physical appearance of such isolation units and the range of effects reported over the years by inmates and activist organizations have been largely veiled to the general public. However, scholars, political bodies, and the press began to pick up conditions of solitary confinement as an issue of inhumane treatment and torture. Although forms of isolated imprisonment have been used in the United States since the late nineteenth century, solitary confinement has grown to be a highly disputed practice within the last forty years. This thesis takes an in-depth look into the goals and efforts of people within a growing national community who are connected by a shared aim of abolishing solitary confinement. This community seeks to spread awareness about what it believes to be a brutal and antiquated violation of human rights as its support base grows within the larger social justice movement of prison reform. I argue for the importance of bringing to light a new body of stories to better understand the parallel activism work undertaken in multiple fields in opposition to solitary confinement. This study exposes the practice through the lens of ex-prisoners, activists, filmmakers, lawyers, professors, and architects. These individuals are based in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Arizona, and California. Their voices echo the wider range of impact that solitary confinement can have on individuals both on the inside and outside of prison walls, demonstrating that both perspectives merit attention.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to give my thanks to the Department of Anthropology at Connecticut College for pushing me to challenge myself to explore an unfamiliar area of study and for its continuous support throughout the process of coordinating my event, “Behind Enemy Lines.” I’d like to thank my wonderful adviser, Catherine Benoit for the energy and dedication she has consistently given. I could not be more grateful for her continuous encouragement, which allowed me the independence to shift my focus. Thank you to my readers, Professors Jeffrey Cole and Ana Campos-Holland, for dedicating their time to this thesis and helping to advertise “Behind Enemy Lines.” I also thank Professor Anthony Graesch for his help with advertising efforts.

This paper could not have been possible without the people who took the time to speak and correspond with me. In sharing their stories and giving advice for avenues to further explore, I have learned more about myself as a student of anthropology, the concept of fieldwork, and more about solitary confinement as a critical issues of social justice. Much gratitude is justly owed to Bonnie Kerness, Ojore Lutalo, Five Mualimmak, Raphael Sperry, Keramet Reiter, Aseem Mehta, Dr. Joan Goldberg, Ana Campos-Holland, Ann Devlin, and a Professor of Anthropology who prefers anonymity.

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work, and assistance with promoting “Behind Enemy Lines.” Thank you to the Facilities and Land Management Committee and Physical Plant for technical assistance.

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## Introduction

*Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories,  
Pasts that others are not allowed to read,  
Accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories  
Held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state,  
Symbolizations encysted in the pain and pleasure of the body*

Michel De Certeau 1980: 108

I ask you to draw me a picture of a prison cellblock the way you first imagine it. Your cells might be darkened, lit solely with single bulbs casting their lights to catch the glint of stainless steel beds, sinks, and toilets. Your cells might feel cold and impersonal, concrete boxes with thick metal bars blocking the windows from a clear view out. The clamor of inmates shouting, exercising, guards' keys jangling, and doors slamming might come to mind. I ask you now to draw a picture of a single cell built for someone intended to serve a prolonged sentence in long-term isolation. This solitary confinement, also described as prison isolation, cell might change significantly in the way your mind imagines it. It might change the way one feels with the knowledge that days, months, or years could pass without significant interaction with anyone. What of the size and scale of the cell, of the way in which isolation might influence the details you add? Does the image a mind might conjure match the reality of such isolation?

I began my research into these ideas and questions, lured by the promise of corroborating or amending my imaginings of how isolation really looks. Not knowing if I had some incorrect ideas about the conditions of solitary confinement, I wondered if



others among the general public might be also out of touch with the realities therein. I hoped to spark some dialogue and interest in the veiled prison world while I tried to understand how constrictive space could so profoundly and widely impact individuals concentrated there for extended periods of time. Where are the intersections between the psychological and the spatial, and how have these been documented in prisons across the United States? It was from such early ideas that my project began to evolve.

This study has been organized into five chapters. In chapter one, I describe the ways in which the project has evolved over time and my experiences with interviewing. I discuss the evolution of my methodology and describe the people whose voices and thoughts so profoundly influenced this thesis, while concurrently embedding personal challenges with the processes of reading and fieldwork. In chapter two, I further define solitary confinement, distinguish between the various types of confinement, and provide a background into the historical legacy of its practice within the United States.

In chapter three, I seek to display how an established and growing community exists, involving individuals that are connected through active work in different spheres. I define what I mean by community in contrast to network, and the relationships of communities to social movements. I discuss how these individuals and organizations share common goals in spreading awareness and piquing interest in solitary confinement, while many also seek to effect changes to who is kept in isolation and for how much time. In chapter four, I detail my conversations and communications with each individual with whom I have spoken or corresponded. Each individual has become engaged with addressing solitary confinement for a variety of reasons, and their research and involvements will be further distinguished here. This chapter sheds light upon the

experience of solitary confinement's impact on the inside and the outside of prisons through the voices shared.

In chapter five, I discuss my experimentation with public engagement and applied anthropology on the topic of solitary confinement. I describe the coordination and efforts I took to bring several of my interviewees to campus. The April 16, 2014 event, involved a lecture, questions and answer session, and an exhibition of prison art, open to the campus and surrounding community. I reflect on how I strove to turn theoretical engagement with existing research on the sorts of events and proceedings intended to raise awareness about the nature of solitary confinement into an event that would engage a wider audience and foster direct interaction with members of the abolitionist community.

## Chapter 1: From Reading to Fieldwork: Project Evolution

**i•so•la•tion** (ī'sə lā' shən, īs'ə-), n. **1.** an act or instance of isolating. **2.** the state of being isolated. **3.** the complete separation from others...**5.** *Psychoanal.* a process whereby an idea or memory is divested of its emotional component  
--Syn. **2.** See **solitude**. **3.** **segregation**.

*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., s.v.  
"isolation"

My interest in solitary confinement began in the fall of 2012 as I settled on a semester-long research portfolio topic for a course, entitled 'The Anthropology of Space and Place.' The class covered the significance of place within anthropology and the varied experiences of space for different communities on a global scale. To distinguish between these two concepts of space and place, I offer one definition which resonated with me in how daily activities are marked by a sense of belonging to a given place while experiencing a particular space:

Place implies space, and each home is a place in space. Space is a property of the natural world, but it can be experienced. From the perspective of experience, place differs from space in terms of familiarity and time. A place requires human agency, is something that may take time to know, and a home especially so. As we move along the earth we pass from one place to another. But if we move quickly the places blur; we lose track of their qualities, and they may coalesce into the sense that we are moving through space. [Sack 2011:19]

I was profoundly influenced by discussion of movement through space as a means of signifying identity and situating within time and context as addressed by several authors.

An interesting quote appears in “Walking in the City” on the subject:

People are put in motion by the remaining relics of meaning, and sometimes by their waste products, the inverted remainders of great ambitions. Things that amount to nothing or almost nothing, symbolize and orient walkers’ steps: names precisely that have ceased precisely to be proper. [De Certeau 1984:105]

These words conjured questions in my mind regarding what drives the formation of connection with space and what does pacing, for instance, in an enclosed area serve for a given person.

Additionally, “Open Spaces and Dwelling Places” addresses how significant meaning can be read through movement by manipulating interaction with space as it is traversed. There is also a deep connection between one’s ability to relate to space and the impact on one’s sense of identity and daily activities from this connection. This connection is perhaps unconsciously made as one goes through routine movements (Gray 1999:449). It was in the recognition of these basic human responses to environment that I first thought up the notion of looking at how spatially constricted people make sense of their space when they do not form an attachment to it by walking or by interacting with others inside it. The population of individuals imprisoned in conditions of solitary confinement sparked my interest in exploring these spatial and psychological concepts.

In the very early stages of research, I was constantly surprised by the how my own imagined drawing differed from the reality of solitary confinement in many prisons. Yet, I began to better understand how mobility, or lack there of, can produce a wide range of impacts on normative human functioning. The idea that “mobilization [is] movement of the heart [that] reconfigures identities even as it draws from foreign connections and

comparisons” is highly significant (Tsing 2005:241). As convicted individuals are moved from their given communities to prisons, into cell blocks or double cells, or to single isolation cells, they face forced macro to micro-scale change in the context of their surroundings. The shocking psychological realization that such change will come with forced adaptation may have a deep emotional impact, whether consciously or not. Varied reactions also depended on the level of the prisoner’s understanding as to why they have been isolated.

In the portfolio, I had the opportunity to read and annotate two or more relevant academic sources per week from various fields of study, including anthropology, psychology, law, and criminology. I presented my findings to the class at the semester’s end. In the presentation, I addressed the interplay between the spatial and psychological in terms of effect on the widespread community of prisoners in solitary confinement in the United States and Canada. I realized that a semester’s worth of research had only further piqued my interest in more deeply understanding isolation practices. I decided to expand the project to a thesis with a three-sphere approach, which included spatial, psychological, and linguistic analysis of solitary confinement. I later chose to omit the linguistic component, as there is little existing research into isolated prison populations. The three-sphere approach was also overly broad to adequately cover in this context. Yet, my ideas about how to most effectively craft this project and expand upon my initial research have since taken many new turns.

As I continued to research the physical appearance of various types of isolation cells and the resulting range of reported psychological responses, I started to search for organizations that actively work with prisoners, either currently isolated, or in helping

with the acclimation process upon release. Knowing well my potential difficulties in trying to approach this topic as an undergraduate student with no prior insights or study into prison populations, I anticipated some struggle in receiving responses from the organizations I contacted. To my surprise and excitement, one of the first organizations to which I reached out with inquiries for correspondence, responded immediately. While I had less success from other individuals and organizations that I had come across in my research and subsequently contacted, I found a profoundly influential resource in the American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) New York Office and its New Jersey based staff<sup>1</sup>. I was provided with a first hand window into the sort of work in which activists can become involved and the greater movements in which they take part. Through the conversations I had with members and leaders of this organization, I heard of new contacts and developed different directions with which to take my evolving project.

Before I began conversing with the AFSC, I intended my project to be a theoretical study and review of the existing literature about solitary confinement from spatial and psychological standpoints. I initially planned to synthesize the existing research to spread awareness about the topic to a campus community in which I have heard little discussion about prison isolation practices. My new contacts led me into unfamiliar but eye opening territory in enabling my project to be based in fieldwork, with which I had minimal prior experience. I recognized my anxiety about the process of undertaking fieldwork on my own, but found it to be a profoundly transformative experience. As I reflected on works I

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<sup>1</sup> All acronyms and abbreviated terms are detailed in the Glossary found on page 163.

<sup>2</sup> A list of all research questions may be found in Appendix B after the references cited.

had read in my first few years as a student of anthropology, many questions about what organizations might be working on what concepts related to solitary confinement arose.

In anthropology courses, students are taught that successful fieldwork will often involve the immersion of the anthropologist in the context of the research. I had learned of fieldwork methods utilizing participant observation. According to this approach, ethnographic work “should deal with the totality of all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community, for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration all the others” (Malinowski 1932:xvi). I began to question the ability to call the blocks of single isolation cells in supermax prisons a wider “prison community.” Can those isolation cells really be part of the larger macro-community of the general population in other security level prisons? In what ways do the impossibility of implementing societal norms, like human connection building and sensory stimulation, impact individuals at deeply psychological levels? What basic needs are so interwoven in the fabric of human functioning, that we do not even realize are required for life? I wondered who might be able to provide such answers.

I recalled reading of the use of cultural relativism in describing the objects that belong to a given society. According to this approach: “by regarding a single implement outside of its surroundings, outside of other inventions of the people to whom it belongs, and outside of other phenomena affecting that people and its productions, we cannot understand its meanings” (Boas 1974:62). I began to think about the prisons and the wider prison system as implements reflective of the United States. As posed in the 2012 documentary, “The Worst of the Worst,” by the Yale Visual Law Project, “there are more prisoners in solitary confinement in the United States than in any other democratic nation

on earth. What do America's prisons say about our nation and its values?" I thought about what layers of meaning are held in those prisons, in their deliberately hard design, specifically created on this nation's soil. I thought that some people must be working to outline or have already published work about these meanings from the prison design perspective. I just needed to find them.

In the fall of 2012, I read about boundary issues that are a large part of the anthropologist's identification with its subject. The content included bringing the field closer to the home, and "the other" subject of study closer to the researcher (Passaro 1997:151-152). Despite the relatively few anthropological studies that I had thus far come across regarding isolated prison populations, I thought there must be more individuals researching the experience of isolation. Isolated inmates, after all, exist within nearly every state. It occurred to me that anthropologists might make interesting and productive use of the wide existing research from other disciplines, namely sociology, psychology, architecture, and law to help draw further innovative conclusions within the field.

In an effort to answer some of these questions and support my initial ideas, I interviewed and corresponded with members of an existing community of individuals and organizations from many areas of impacted study. These people that are working actively and often together to raise awareness, spread interest, and educate about the varied experiences of those confined in prolonged isolation. These exchanges took place between September 2013 and January 2014. I chose individual interviewing as a method of information collection because the interview is a particularly useful means of grasping a given person's perspective and absorbing why certain meaning is attributed to particular



experiences or occasions (Berg 2001:72). Other forms of acquiring information, such as survey taking, questionnaire distribution, or focus group interviewing, did not seem the best method for providing the individualized voices I sought for this thesis (Berg 2001:73).

As I spoke with the afore-mentioned interviewees, I learned of different awareness-raising projects that have been completed or are currently in the works around the nation. One project that stuck out to me in particular was the idea of constructing a to-scale model cell as an exhibition or installation piece. Such a work is meant to give the audience a fleeting sensory experience of how isolation can look and feel. I had originally heard of this mode of engaging public audiences with a physical realization of specific forms of confinement from the project, “Herman’s House.” The story behind the project is chronicled in a documentary, directed by Angad Singh Bhalla, which describes how a young New York based artist teamed up with Herman Wallace. Wallace was a terminally ill inmate who had spent forty years in solitary confinement originally for bank robbery and then additionally on charges of murdering a prison guard. He is one of the three men who became known collectively as the “Angola Three,” in the 2000s. Upon hearing of Herman’s case, artist Jackie Sumell, contacted him and developed with him a project to create his dream house (Bhalla, dir. 2012). The film follows Wallace’s story through the ultimate release from his prison cell in Louisiana.

One highly influential moment of this film occurs when Wallace’s sister enters the replica of the six-by-nine foot cell built by Jackie. The moment is described when Wallace’s sister enables the audience:

to imagine with her, with Sumell and with Wallace how the physical structures that contain us shape not only our identities, but those of our most intimate

relations. Like the images in the film, both animated and actual, Wallace's story lingers, too. [Reiter "Watching Herman's House" 2013]

Physically creating the cell spaces, based on the descriptions of inmates currently or previously confined, has the power to put a face and individuality to the situations of the at least 80,000 prisoners currently held in solitary conditions at any given time in the United States (National Religious Campaign Against Torture)

I heard more about construction of to-scale model cells from some of my interviewees. The first was Five Mualimm-ak, whose personal experience with solitary confinement and current activism efforts have prompted him to build a cell of his own with which he is in progress. The second was architect Raphael Sperry, who explained to me how similar installation projects have been undertaken in the Bay area of California. For instance, a model special housing unit (SHU) was set up alongside the outdoor shows of the San Fran Mime Troupe in July of 2012. It was intended to "raise awareness to a good crowd," according to Sperry (personal interview, January 10, 2014). The public exhibition at the shows was sponsored by the organization, Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity, in order to commemorate the hunger strikes in California on the part of isolated prisoners (prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity 2012)

Jackie Sumell described that the only means she believed could get Herman out of Angola was to prompt him to dream (Bhalla, dir. 2012). The overwhelming response to this documentary, its coverage in the press after its release, and the positive public turnouts for viewing such constructed cells had the effects of making people think and talk increasingly about solitary confinement. I was encouraged by all of these successful examples to build a cell of my own on the Connecticut College campus. I met with Connecticut College Physical Plant, the College's Facilities and Land Management

Committee, and corresponded with various campus departments in Art, Art History, and Anthropology on behalf of funding and construction methods. I sought to gauge the feasibility of such an endeavor on my part.

Despite the potential positive outcomes, I later came to realize that the cell construction was no longer essential to the process of describing the gathered stories of the community built around the abolishment of prison isolation. I commend those who have undertaken this powerful means of bringing important attention to this topic. I feel that it was vital for me to explore the possibilities of constructing a cell myself to understand the high levels of commitment and energy of those who do construct exhibitions or coordinate and produce visually stimulating events of a similar nature. For this thesis, I have chosen ultimately to concentrate my efforts on both the written portion and an event to bring several interviewees to campus for a presentation on the topic. This event will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five as I detail my motivations in enabling further discussion on campus about prisons. I hoped to provide individuals the opportunity to make their own informed decisions about the controversial issues raised.

### **Purpose and Organization of Study**

I think back to my original ideas about distinguishing popular imaginings of solitary confinement from reality and better understanding the psychological implications of spatial constriction. These controversial concepts are highly relevant to, examined, and raised to public audiences by many individuals, such as those with whom I conversed. This study seeks to build upon the existing research done mainly within the law,

psychology, architecture, and sociology fields, with significant reference made to the small body of anthropological work that exists at this time. It is intended to better understand the nature of solitary confinement through the lenses of members of the community actively working to further discussion on solitary confinement within the United States. I hope, in this fashion, to contribute a new body of stories, which includes those of people involved with issues of solitary confinement, most of who have not been incarcerated personally. These individuals are also differentially affected by the nature of their work, which is sometimes quite long-term and emotionally demanding. It is no less important to bring to light these stories than the stories of the inmates on whose behalf these individuals and organizations advocate, protest, and generally speak. Their voices and this thesis serve to demonstrate that solitary confinement has far wider reach and greater impact than might be initially realized.

My focus lies on certain areas of the United States, including the Northeast, namely Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey, as well as California. When I began this study, I did not have a specific geographic location in mind on which I anticipated concentrating. My reading and research prior to commencing with the fieldwork covered case studies from all across the country. Yet, my conversations with individuals developed out of the hope that I would have an easier time of coordinating conversation in closer proximity. However, I believe the cases I highlight and the wider conclusions I draw may bear certain similarities or can be applied to individuals and organizations advocating for isolated prisoner rights across the nation. This study does not take a stance on the highly debated social justice and human rights issues argued in relation to the topic of solitary confinement. It does not inherently argue for or against the

practice of solitary confinement itself. The study, instead, seeks to relay varied experiences of solitary confinement, whatever the stance of a given individual personally. It seeks to display how solitary confinement reaches those incarcerated on the inside and those in the outside world, in ways that both merit attention.

### **Methodology and Individuals Interviewed**

This study employs a combined research and interviewing approach, with primary focus on the latter. The combination seemed the most appropriate data-collecting method to gain a significant background in the history of the practice of solitary confinement and the variety in experience of this practice across state lines. This approach was vital for me to better understand and be familiarized with the terminology, case study examples, and experiences described to me by my interviewees. The research gave me an important starting framework with which I could contextualize the interviews in terms of understanding the historical impact of isolation practice as it evolved. I also sought to better understand why so many individuals seek to encourage others to think and discuss more about the topic with an aim to address the importance of prisons in the lives of those people on the outside.

I struggled to make the transition to fieldwork, as the research component had lain more within my comfort zone in terms of practiced methodology. Yet, I learned that gaining first hand examples of activism efforts, better enabled me to see the wide range of people whose lives solitary confinement in one way or another affects. The fieldwork does actively work, in some ways, to shift attention away from the author and place

emphasis on the voices of others who are also working on such issues. This method aims to approach these figures as “partners in investigation,” rather than focusing solely on the anthropologist’s voice (Tobin 1988:173). The individuals interviewed cannot be described as subjects, but rather as informants and experts on the literature and/or efforts undertaken within respective fields.

However, through this process, I struggled to suppress my subjectivity and separate my own emotions from the fieldwork in which I was engaging. I struggled to feel that I was giving enough back to the people sharing their personal experiences with me. My confusions resonated with those described by Ruth Behar in *The Vulnerable Observer*. She wrote: “[...] so begins our work, our hardest work- to bring the ethnographic moment back, to resurrect it, to communicate the distance, which too quickly starts to feel like an abyss, between what we saw and heard and our inability, finally to do justice to it in our representations” (Behar 1996:9). I was concerned that my questions were too formal, too invasive, too cold, and that my inexperience with interviewing would come across in ways that might impede the strength of conversations. Yet, I realized that the connections, however they may originate and evolve, between interviewer and interviewees are extremely important for both parties alike to gain something powerful from the shared experience of communication. I learned, over time, that a balance between inserting personal growth, minimizing personal opinion, and bringing out the stories of others was the most effective means of addressing my fieldwork.

This study also seeks to open up readership and peak interest in education about the nature of solitary confinement by citing both academic and non-academic voices.

Both types are equally significant, as all of those participating in this study became involved with solitary confinement issues for very different reasons. Some of these may resonate with certain readers more so than others. The language in this study is meant to be widely readable and approachable to avoid excluding potential readers by means of instituting the author's overarching textual authority (Tobin 1988:174). The interviews, themselves, were also intended to bear the same degree of approachability and professionalism for those taking part in my project.

For all my interactions, I chose from two modes of communication based on what was possible given time changes, busy schedules, and personal preferences. I wrote to my interviewees or spoke with them over the phone. I recognized that I would not be able to read the body language of my interviewees in order to steer the interview most effectively for the greatest variety of answers. I also realized that I had to legitimize my study, engender an interest in my project, and foster for interviewees the importance of each of their voices to my study (Berg 2001:83). To create this level of professionalism and interest, I posed questions to those with whom I communicated. Before beginning my interviews, I prepared a list of eight multi-part research questions, which I seek to address in the various chapters of this thesis.<sup>2</sup> I crafted specific interview questions for each interviewee by using such broader research questions as well as my insight into their careers and lives.<sup>3</sup> I prepared a set of three to fourteen questions for each interview with a median number of about nine questions per interviewee. Some of these questions were modified or follow up questions were posed to each person interviewed due to the more open semistructure of the interviews.

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<sup>2</sup> A list of all research questions may be found in Appendix B after the references cited.

<sup>3</sup> A list of all interview questions may be found in Appendix C.

I chose to utilize a semistructured approach which is “open ended, but follows a general script and covers a list of topics” (Russell Bernard 2006:210). I felt this approach most suitable for creating an atmosphere of desired positivity and comfort, so that each interview felt more like a conversation. I felt it would draw more interesting anecdotes from each interviewee while still maintaining a professional framework. I am of the opinion that both interviewer and interviewee have much to learn about the goals and pursuits of the other, which I felt would benefit most from the open format for communication.

Although I cite multiple voices in this thesis, I do not employ a particular style of textual formatting that lends itself to multivocal ethnography. I did not feel that such a technique was necessary to convey the importance of relaying the voices of the community from which I have drawn a sample. Yet, I have taken inspiration from the words of Tobin on the topic and the works of Richard Price who employs various fonts and situates different voices side by side in a particular column orientation in *The Convict and the Colonel*. Multivocality can also be relevant to the multilocality of a given place in the sense that “a single place may be experienced quite differently” (Rodman 2003:212). This idea resonated with me, as solitary confinement has a vast range of impacts over a wide population, and national level efforts in opposition to its practice are continually emerging. Joint participation further solidifies the bonds of community held between those people who work to transform how the American public perceives prison isolation circumstances.

In terms of those voices represented in this thesis, I have had the profoundly influential opportunity to speak with ten people who have all contributed to this project’s



evolution by putting more faces to the impact of prison isolation. I had the pleasure to begin my first interviewing experience with members of the AFSC, based on the east coast. Just through AFSC alone, I was introduced to Bonnie Kerness, Director of the Prison Watch Project, run through the AFSC. Through this initial inquiry to the AFSC's New York Office, I also received a response from Five Mualimm-ak, an ex-prisoner and activist with the AFSC. Through Bonnie, I was put in touch with Ojore Lutalo, who like Mualimm-ak, works with the organization to share his stories of prison isolation. Lutalo is also an ex-prisoner and prison artist, who was incarcerated in New Jersey's State Prison at Trenton.

Bonnie also brought to my attention the work of architect, adjunct professor, and the President of Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), Raphael Sperry through an article she sent me detailing Sperry's efforts in the mid-2000s. Through my conversation with Sperry, I found out about the local and relevant 2012 documentary of the Yale Visual Law Project, "The Worst of the Worst." The documentary enabled prisoners, ex-prisoners, parents, professors, correctional officers, and members of the Connecticut State Corrections Departments to weigh in on their experiences with Northern Correctional Institution. This documentary was co-directed by current Yale student, Aseem Mehta, with whom I have also had the pleasure of corresponding. Sperry referenced the work of Professor of Criminology and Law and Society, Keramet Reiter, with whom I spoke about her experiences with extensive research, education, and writing a book on solitary confinement. Additionally, my adviser to this thesis is personally acquainted with a Professor of Anthropology, who has requested anonymity, yet whose anthropological views greatly informed this thesis.

The physical act of communication has enabled a more personal engagement with each individual, particularly when a voice could be placed with a name and a face. As a Senior Admissions Fellow with the Office of Admissions at Connecticut College, I have co-currently experienced the benefits of fostering personal connections in the interviews I conduct. This connection building enables the best understanding of what drives each prospective student in terms of goals, motivations, and passions. One applicant, for instance, wrote me: “Your fascination with anthropology made me feel very connected to you [...] After what you said about how students are encouraged to run with their passions, I felt that I could be a great fit for this college” (Cohen, letter to author, October, 2013). I felt a strong reciprocal benefit from this particular interview and many others, one that can come with the interview process in the contexts of this study as well. The stories I have heard through my interviews have effectively formed the basis of the fieldwork that lies at the core of this thesis. Without them, my project’s evolution would likely not have enabled the same understanding of how wide the range of impact of solitary confinement expands for those affected by it.

### **The Interview Experience**

The process of interviewing has affected me greatly, firstly as a student of anthropology. I had some prior knowledge of what I felt to be proper interview etiquette and expected action on my part as the interviewer, which I utilized in the construction of these interviews. Yet, there were other significant aspects of the interview process that I gradually learned must also be observed for the most successful and reciprocally

enriching interview experience. Initially, before experiencing what worked well and not as well, I chose a semistructured interviewing approach. I anticipated that I might only be able to talk with certain individuals once or twice, given the number of people who were agreeing to speak with me. I felt this option appropriate to avoid disproportionate control of the conversation on my part, and to maximize the time had for each interview (Russell Bernard 2006:212).

I began the interviews by asking each interviewee for informed verbal consent, and sought to ensure they understood from an early stage where my project focus lay and what I intended to do with their answers. I structured the conversation in accordance with specific information I was seeking from each person, and I sought to enable the interviewee to respond with what they felt was important. I also encouraged interviewees to offer advice and address new questions that arose in answers to others for clarification or interest purposes (Russell Bernard 2006:216). I hoped they would deny me certain answers if they were uncomfortable addressing them over the course of our discussions, as I am still learning to use the most sensitive and neutral phrasing. First and foremost, I sought to follow the sure advice of Henry Wolcott to, “Pay as much attention to your own words as you do to the words of your respondents” (Wolcott 2006:224). The fundamental goal of the interview was for each person to feel respected, engaged, and open to voicing his or her opinions.

There were certain anthropological methods I chose to implement which I later discovered were established techniques with specific names. Later research into these techniques was valuable for me to see the range of benefits from their use. I found that certain probing techniques could stimulate further responses or steer the conversations in

different ways. It was important to me that no respondent feel uncomfortable as a result of my methodology. I found the most useful techniques to be the “uh-huh” and “long question” probing. With the “uh-huh” technique, I realized that affirmative and neutral comments, such as “yes, right, and that makes sense,” were helpful for the interviews to take on more relaxed character. These phrases also helped to alleviate awkward pauses that could have undermined my credibility as an interviewer.

The “long question” probing enabled me to phrase my questions for greater detail and specificity. Additionally, I was able to collect a more diverse range of answers to my initial research questions. Since I received more responses with this method, I was able to carry out longer interviews and build up stronger connections and rapport over time. However, I realized that some of my questions contained either too many sections or were overly complex. These required further clarification on my part, which on occasion, threw off the desired ease of conversational flow. In future interviewing endeavors, I plan to simplify questions and refrain from asking multiple linked questions at once. Instead, I will opt to use a “tell-me-more” probing technique to ask for further related information using phrases such as “can you further describe” or “can you elaborate on [...]” (Russell Bernard 2006:219-220).

My background informational search enabled me to bring up certain events interviewees coordinated or attended, projects on which they were working, or published works. From these references, I structured my questions so interviewees had the opportunity to correct me if I made an inaccurate assertion or provide additional follow-up information. For instance, I knew from my research, that one of my interviewees was a Professor of Architecture at Stanford. I wanted to hear more about his experience

working with students on issues relating to solitary confinement and prison architecture. I used a form of “phased assertion” to gain further material by presenting information I had acquired prior to the interview (Russell Bernard 2006:222). I asked Sperry, “I understand you are a professor of Architecture at Stanford- how do you approach college students on these issues?” (personal interview, January 10, 2014) The interviewee’s response clarified the nature of his past and present teaching and provided his hopes for future seminar classes on related topics. This information was both new and highly useful for me.

Through this interview experience, I learned that many of my interviewees had connections to one another. Referencing such relationships opened up the conversation, thereby enabling me the opportunity to network through various fields. I feel such networking enhanced the credibility of my research for my interviewees, and the more I had the opportunity to interview individuals, the more I realized which techniques did not work as well and which ones may have produced additional useful and interesting information. I had neglected to pre-test my interview questions with a third party to make sure that they both made sense and were not too lengthy (Berg 2001:69, 77). My interviewees became confused on several occasions, and I had to repeat or reword the questions quickly. I also noticed that broader, heavier, or more controversial questions are best saved for the end of the interview once a certain level of comfort and trust has been established to prevent concluding the interview on an awkward or negative note.

Additionally, I learned to be discreet in my note taking when conducting interviews over the phone as it became difficult to balance my quick follow-up replies and my attempts to take notes during interviewee responses. In-person interviews would

alternatively enable a recording device to be used so that crafting follow up questions becomes the focus. However, given that these were phone interviews, I learned I must be careful that typing out notes on my keyboard did not distract from the flow of the interview. I found hand written notes alleviated some of this distraction potential. Yet, I was often caught off guard when an interviewee finished responding and I was still writing. This may be alleviated in future instances by writing down key reminder phrases rather than exact quotes so a more structured follow-up opportunity might not be missed.

Furthermore, I recognized that poor phone reception made for a difficult interview. In future instances of phone interviewing, I will make sure that I am in a location of certain reception for smooth conversational flow. I would also like to try in-person interviews, where possible, so reception is not a factor and I can make use of other potentially beneficial techniques and visual or bodily cues. These techniques include “walking probing” in which certain sites would be visited, either physically or virtually, to provoke memories, emotions, and discussions on the personal significance of the place connected with the location (De Leon and Cohen 2005:202-203). Such sites could be former prison cells, university classrooms, the desk where mail from inmates and families of inmates was constantly read, prison classrooms where volunteer tutoring was completed, or the venue where a first public lecture was given. Such visits can help to elicit verbal or non-verbal responses that otherwise might not be provoked in order to better understand personal significance of the built environment, enhanced by the ability to move through a meaningful space.

If I had the opportunity to continue the study, I would also like to make such aforementioned in-person visits in order to more effectively utilize an “interactive

interviewing” approach. With this method, I would be able to make stronger connections, not just with research, but also with awareness raising initiatives such as lectures, protests, and prison art exhibitions. Increased sharing of stories and personal experiences on both the part of the interviewee and myself, as the interviewer, might enable a deepening of our relationship, particularly over time (Berg 2001:73).

The interview process has also impacted me as a civilian. I was shocked to learn that I live a mere hour and twenty minutes from a supermax prison where inmates are kept in solitary confinement. I was initially appalled at this revelation, and I continue to marvel at why I had personally not heard more in televised news reports or in local newspaper stories about the facility or proceedings there. I realized how little discussion and debate was have had in my school settings on the controversial nature of American isolation practices, or even relating to general prison operations. This confirmed a desire to foster further discussion on solitary confinement in relaying the stories gathered from interviews. This is a goal shared by my interviewees through their respective work.

The act of connection building through the interview process, itself, has opened my eyes to the many detailed layers that make up the analysis of solitary confinement. I feel I have begun to penetrate some of these layers, for instance by recognizing that those involved in a highly debated social issue are motivated for different reasons and exhibit various physical and psychological symptoms. I discuss the range of impacts in succeeding chapters, but first turn to further defining solitary confinement, and analyzing the changes in its practice over the past several hundred years.

## Chapter Two: Understanding the Nature of Solitary Confinement

*I know what it's like in hell  
I did a stretch in a triflin' cell  
What you know about twenty-three and one  
Lockdown all day, underground, neva seein' the sun  
Vision stripped from you, neva seein' your son*

Beanie Siegel 1999 Roc-A-Fella Def Jam

In order to understand the community of individuals who are involved and working on issues of solitary confinement, it is important to first look more closely at the practice and how it has evolved over the history of the United States. Solitary confinement varies in many respects, from time spent in units to the reasons for isolation to the names for various cell types. Described by Elmira Correctional Facility inmate, William Blake, the isolation cell, often referred to as “the box,” is “a place like none other on planet earth” (Voices From Solitary 2013) Although the use of isolation in prisons is among the oldest rehabilitative techniques, it has been more recently and widely adopted in countries around the world from a system pioneered in the United States. This has happened in the last several hundred years (Manion 2014). Solitary confinement has become highly controversial and increasingly an international focus of discussion.

The United States, although containing just five percent of the world's population, houses twenty-five percent of the world's prisoners (National Religious Campaign



Against Torture 2014). From 1970-2010, the number of inmates in prisons in the United States increased from about 20,000 to about two million, cementing the country's status as possessing the highest rate of incarceration worldwide over Russia. The United States also possesses the highest number of prisoners over China (Reiter 2012:1). Estimates place the number of inmates in solitary confinement at any given moment in the United States between 70,000 and 80,000 people; although others studying prisons believe these numbers are too low, according to Bonnie Kerness (personal interview, October 11, 2013). Between 20,000-25,000 inmates are isolated in prisons where the entire prison population is housed in solitude, according to Raphael Sperry (personal interview, January 10, 2014). The following chapter seeks to further detail this infamous incarceration practice and its evolution over space and time, with particular focus on its usage in the United States.

### **Definition of Solitary Confinement**

*Solitary confinement*, or segregated housing, is defined in Standard 23-1.0 of the American Bar Association's Criminal Justice Standards on the Treatment of Prisoners as the:

housing of a prisoner in conditions characterized by substantial isolation from other prisoners, whether pursuant to disciplinary, administrative, or classification action. 'Segregated housing' includes restriction of a prisoner to the prisoner's assigned living quarters [Schlanger 2010:1430].

This definition allows for the experience of similar isolation conditions for a variety of reasons. These range from non-disciplinary classifications to security and protection for the prisoner, guards, and inmate population to direct punishment for violating prison

regulations. Long-term segregation may be imposed for specific health reasons as well (Hresko 2006:2). Mentally ill inmates, those with learning disabilities, and individuals with little schooling compromise a large part of the isolated population. The rise in rates of isolation coincided directly with the de-centralization of mental health institutions in the mid twentieth century (Guenther 2011:258). There exists a common misconception that inmates in solitary confinement number among the most violent or the worst of the worst, yet there are a number of names for segregation units, all of which contain a wide variety of inmate types (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:14).

Most prison institutions from county jails through minimum and maximum-security prisons contain isolation cells or units with blocks of such cells. The names for solitary confinement found in prisons of varying security levels around the country include “administrative segregation” or “ad-seg,” “management control units,” “complex detention units,” “security threat group management,” “specialty housing units,” and “protective custody units.” Additional names include “the hole,” “the bucket,” “the bane,” “the chiller,” and “lockup” (Schoen, prod. 2009). The duration of a single stay in cells with these names may last anywhere from a number of days to weeks or years. In the United States, prisoners are eligible to serve life sentences or sentences without the opportunity for parole which may impact the trajectory of stays in isolation. In other countries, such as in Europe, even the most heinous crimes are often punishable with sentences of thirty to forty years, which may result in shorter isolation stays (ADPSR).

There are also particular policies implemented and associated with certain types of isolation cells. These policies may relate from time incarcerated to types of prisoners confined therein. Ex-prisoner, Ojore Lutalo, who spent twenty-two years in a

management control unit in New Jersey, described some of the differences between the various names given to prison isolation in an interview with me. Lutalo distinguished between administrative segregation units and management control units (MCU) specifically. He identified administrative segregation cells as physically smaller in size, used for punishment purposes, and as the type of cell where additional time could be accumulated by breaking prison rules. Katherine Sanguinetti, Director of Public Relations at the Colorado Department of Corrections, corroborated Lutalo's description of the punitive nature of this cell type and additionally described administrative segregation as intended for inmates who are violent with prison staff and one another, including those "who can't follow even the basic rules" (Zucker, dir. 2012). In "ad-seg," inmates are given release dates, unlike inmates who spend time isolated in management control units, according to Ojore Lutalo (personal interview, October 10, 2013). MCU tend to be larger in size and may contain inmates who are deemed to pose a threat to the general prison population due to the nature of their personal principles. These principles may include religious beliefs or political convictions, as in Lutalo's case (Lutalo, dir. 2010). These political convictions and the circumstances surrounding Lutalo's case will be further detailed in chapter four.

Complex detention units tend to house inmates for short-term disciplinary action or until cells free up in the general prison population of a given facility. However, time in such isolation cells can continue beyond the facility's limit imposed for them. In Arizona prisons, for instance, stays are capped at ninety days, yet inmates may be sent back into isolation fairly quickly upon release to general population. They may go in and out of isolation so frequently that their collective time spent in confinement can be quite lengthy

(Lowen and Isaacs 2012:12). Alternatively, security threat group management cells are further geared towards inmates with suspected street gang affiliations (King, prod. 2010). Inmates placed in protective custody are often isolated for a wide range of risks posed to placement in the general population. They are seen as posing threats to themselves and/or to others. Reasons for placement therein might include prior threats, reputation as an informant, physical, verbal, or sexual abuse or harassment, and gender orientation (Arizona Department of Corrections 2013:4). Some prisoners have elected to take this status of housing in protective custody, an element of control that is not held by individuals who are isolated as punishment for their actions once inside prisons (Haney 2003:135).

### **Conditions of Solitary Confinement**

The conditions of solitary confinement in all of these units, despite the changes in name, bear many similarities. Prisoners are often assigned to isolation cells by prison authorities, who have little judicial oversight from higher governing bodies or courts (Schoen, prod. 2009). There are currently no federal laws, and few consistent state laws governing how long and when solitary confinement may be imposed (Hresko 2006:5). However, new legislation has resulted in more concrete rulings in states like Maine, Mississippi, and New York (The Editorial Board 2014:A24). These prisoners will experience solitude twenty-two to twenty-four hours per day, often in cells that are on average seven to nine feet by eight to ten feet (15 Days “The Facts” 2014). Beanie Siegel’s song, at the beginning of this chapter, references this “twenty-three and one”

reality whereby inmates may have the opportunity to leave their cells for an hour or two per day for isolated recreation and showers. Inmates often have little structure to their days with the exceptions of meal times and the hour or several hours of solitary respite from their cells. There are few activities, programming, and access to materials that might stimulate their senses or put them in contact with other people save short instances of forced contact with correctional officers, according to Laura Royner of the University of Denver College of Law (Zucker, dir. 2012).

As Philip Bulman, editor and writer with the National Institute of Justice, argues, “prison is a self-contained environment in which everyone’s activity is tightly regulated and monitored” (Bulman 2012:58). This state of regulation is profoundly embedded in the physical architecture of the space in terms of lighting, sound control, visual constriction of the outside environment, and spatial restriction to be further discussed in succeeding chapters. The ultimate goal of solitary confinement is total repression of any hint of resistance on the part of inmates, inside what is commonly referred to as a “prison within a prison” (Kim, Pendergrass, Zelon 2012:7). A “black box within a black box” is another means of describing the grim reality of the situation (Ettlinger 2005:151).

Other facilities, called ‘supermax’ prisons or “security housing units” (SHU) house all inmates in isolation cells. They are also known by names such as “closed custody units,” “separation,” and “special management units (SMU) (Lowen and Isaacs 2007:10). These institutions, operating on efficacy and strict rotations of staff, enable long-term and more total isolation for inmates convicted of a wide range of crimes (Rhodes 2007:550). The inmate makeup of supermax facilities resembles that of the segregated prison populations in other prisons, yet inmates are placed in supermax due to certain security

classifications determined by a point system (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:12). Inmates are often isolated for the same sorts of behavioral violations, violent actions, repeated rule breaking, posing a threat to themselves or other prison personnel, protection, and for mental illness (Rhodes 2007:551). All inmates on death row are also housed in a given state's supermax facilities (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:14).

Forty-two states contain one or two supermax prisons, although tracking down an exact number remains elusive despite the increased attention given to supermax, according to Sperry (personal interview, January 10, 2014). Aseem Mehta, Yale Co-Director of the documentary, *The Worst of the Worst*, places the number of supermax facilities at forty-five (email February 4, 2014). Such facilities may contain hundreds or over one thousand isolation beds, as in New York's two SHU facilities of Southport and Upstate (Kim, Pendergrass, and Zelon 2012:8). The combination of near total isolation and modern technology and mechanization in supermax institutions make them distinctive entities in the history of correctional practices within the United States (Janson 2004:23).

### **Prison Population Makeup: Disparities and Trends**

The makeup of the smallest county jail all the way up through the highest security supermax exists along gendered, age-based, racial, and ethnic lines. These representations are especially visible among populations in solitary confinement. Although solitary confinement is imposed upon individuals of all orientations, and on juveniles as well as adults, there are clear trends of over-representation of certain groups over others in such



In terms of racially based disparities, African Americans, Latinos, and other minority groups make up an overwhelming majority in isolation as compared with Caucasian prisoners. According to 2012 data from New York State Department of Corrections and Community Support, the makeup of isolation units in the state of New York included 14.6 percent white inmates, 59 percent black inmates, and 24.7 percent Hispanic inmates (ACLU 2012:24). Individuals are often placed in security threat groups due to suspected gang or radical political affiliations. This is also true of supermax institutions where security classification scores are largely influenced by race. At California's Pelican Bay Supermax Prison, ninety-eight percent of the security housing unit was reportedly comprised of gang members as of November 2011 (Amnesty International 2012:14). Some of the main security threat groups identified include the Mexican Mafia, Mau-Mau, Black Panther Party, Black Liberation Army, Warrior Society, Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, and the Aryan Brotherhood. Body imagery and profiling are often used as a determining factor for an inmate's participation in such groups (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:17).

Shaheed Brown, a former inmate, was sent straight into six years of isolation at the age of nineteen in Northern State Prison's security threat group management in New Jersey. He described gang segregation from his own experience, stating even though he was housed alone, he could see other people from his location. There grew a collective feeling of needing to stick together against the prison's correctional officers. He told Bonnie Kerness in an interview:

*Shaheed Brown:* The yard is broken into cages so they have everybody packed inside the cage like a sardine. So you have the Latin Kings in one cage, the Bloods in one cage, the Crips in this cage... The Aryans in another cage...



*Bonnie Kerness: And how many people in a cage?*

*Shaheed Brown: Um, as many as they try to fit in there. Sometimes it depends on how um large your gang is, if it's around 20 people. Sometimes they try to break it in if they feel like they have people trying to rebel against or something like that but if its mellow they probably try to stick... (Kerness 2011).*

Such a description underscores the prevalence of isolation on the grounds of racial or ethnic presumptions. There are also rising numbers of Native American prisoners, particularly females, in isolation units in Western parts of the United States (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:15-16). Correlations are drawn between “sociocultural dynamics” such as high rates of alcoholism and addiction on reservations and rising rates of incarceration (Gould 1995:181). These trends have spurred widespread criticism of penal policies by many human rights and social justice organizations around the country from various fields of study. Many draw connections between power relations within prisons and historical state repression, as well as state-sanctioned radical supremacist operations (Rodríguez 2008:163). Some call the high racial disparities a reflection of a “new Jim Crow era,” in which African Americans and other racial minorities are denied constitutional rights (Gumbel 2013:6).

### **The Connection Between Isolation and Recidivism**

Due to a “revolving door” cycle, high recidivism rates are documented for both prisoners in supermax facilities and those in isolation units in lower level security prisons (Toch 2003:222). Lengthy confinements and the difficulty of acquiring a transfer out of solitary units often result in the release of inmates directly back into society. As

psychiatrist and expert on the psychological impact of prison isolation, Stuart Grassian, stated: “There is something intrinsically illogical for any correctional system to become so preoccupied with control and punishment as to lose sight of the fact that virtually all of the inmates in its custody will someday be released back into our communities” (Lowen and Isaacs 2007:12). Inmates have few rehabilitative resources or time to transition to once again being around people in stimulating environments (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:9). Thus, the cycle of incarceration continues as many inmates are released with little job or skill education and training.

Many who entered prison on drug-related charges often suffer relapses upon release due to lack of treatment and placement back into drug-infested environments with few support systems (Ersolmaz, filmmaker. 2010). These individuals are likely to commit crimes that will send them back to prison or cause disciplinary infractions leading to further time spent in isolation circumstances (Kim, Pendergrass, Zelon 2012:24). There are also demonstrated correlations between higher recidivism rates and mental illness, often exacerbated or emergent in inmates in solitary confinement (Lowen and Isaacs 2012:38).

There is a deep concurrent relationship between the high rates of recidivism in prison environments, particularly in situations of solitary confinement, and the high costs of housing individuals therein. The Commissioner for the Department of Corrections in Mississippi concluded that solitary confinement cost the state almost double that of general population incarceration while resulting in higher rates of violence and recidivism. The Commissioner cut the number of isolated prisoners by more than ninety percent, which saved the state millions of dollars, reduced incidents of prison violence,

and reduced recidivism rates in Mississippi. The money that was saved was reinvested in rehabilitation programs, according to Aseem Mehta (email to author, February 4, 2014). Maine and Colorado have also reported significant savings in reducing the level of prison segregation implemented, lowering over-time costs, and reducing extra personnel needed to maintain higher security levels (Kim, Pendergrass, Zelon 2012:46). This sort of action is not, however, extensively practiced across the United States, and solitary confinement continues to remain widely implemented at present.

### **The Economic Dimension: The Prison Industry**

The United States Corrections System is an industry unto itself with a dependency and stake in the widespread growth of prisons. From privatizing prison institutions and services such as those relating to healthcare and food, to designing supermax facilities, to encouraging constant innovation in state of the art technologies for maximizing control, the goal of the industry is to maximize revenue by means of cutting costs (Rhodes 2001:65). The prison sector creates an immense amount of employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, which have the effect of lessening the appearance of unemployment and increasing the inhabitants of sparsely populated regions (Rhodes 2001:67). By the turn of the twenty-first century, the American prison industry had become the third largest employer behind Wal-Mart and the global work agency, Manpower cementing its economic role (Wacquant 2002:383).

The nature of the prison evokes that of the factory in that large numbers of people are readily available to complete manual labor and perform duties within an institutionalized setting. In the early twentieth century, the American prison was

structured along rigid time-based and spatial lines, a representation of the modern drive for reformation. When coupled with the for-profit nature of the prison system, a complex system of power developed into a lucrative industry (Rhodes 2001:69). As the industry has grown over time and space with the construction of more prisons of increasing scale, incarceration has become the *raison d'être*. Many sectors of the incarceration process from providing services to macro-scale construction efforts are profitable with the privatization of prisons, yet the use of solitary confinement stands as one aspect through which the corrections industry loses money as compared with housing prisoners in general populations.

In terms of costs themselves, solitary confinement cells are more expensive to build than general population cells, and they are more costly housing options to maintain. Construction costs for supermax prisons can rise two or even three times higher than for other high-security facilities (Mears 2006:ii, 26). Estimates place the average cost of a single year of housing an inmate in solitary confinement at \$75,000, paid by taxpayers, as opposed to \$25,000 for a prisoner housed in a general prison population (15 Days “The Facts”). The construction of supermax prisons, at the state level, is heavily subsidized using federal funding and standards with the average rate of construction per year at one or two supermax prisons nationwide (Kamel and Kerness 2003:6). Non-local businesses can also benefit from contracted affiliations with supermax prisons and state correctional departments in providing services. Hence, there are a range of stakeholders and interest groups that stand to profit economically from the construction and maintenance of prisons utilizing solitary confinement. However, the practice of solitary confinement is

inherently more costly to the states that employ the use of the practice, and therefore to their taxpayers (Mears 2006:38).

This emphasis on the business side of corrections starkly contrasts with the rehabilitation programming and those efforts made to prevent further increase in recidivism. Piper Kerman is the author of *Orange is the New Black*, testified on a panel during the Second Congressional Hearing, “Reassessing Solitary Confinement, II: The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences,” before the Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights. During the hearing, which took place February 25, 2014, Kerman stated, “The isolation of solitary is just a metaphor for the total isolation of incarceration, and when we put people on the margins, it makes it harder for them to return to the community” (US Senate Judiciary Subcommittee 2014). Such a statement espouses a cause and effect relationship between prison isolation and positive community re-entry, in a way that begins to highlight significant aspects of the big picture behind the corrections industry. However, as discussed above, there are many factors at play, which place significant attention, as well as criticism on contemporary prison practices.

### **United States & International Policies on Solitary Confinement**

Solitary confinement, although a highly controversial practice, currently is widely applied in prisons throughout the United States. In terms of policy, the lack of existing U.S. federal laws to govern the use of prison isolation espouses a different outlook than is demonstrated at an international level of policymaking. Many criticisms of solitary

confinement center on determining whether the practice of prison segregation violates Article Seven of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, enforced in March 1976 but not adopted into U.S. law until 1992. The article reads as such: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (ICCPR 1976:5). This policy is further cited in Article One of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and in Article Five of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly 1984). Additionally, advocates of banning solitary confinement cite Article One of the Covenant against Torture, which prohibits “state officials from intentionally inflicting severe physical or mental pain or suffering on individuals for the purposes of coercion or punishment” (Hresko 2006:7). In these instances, the term *torture*, itself references:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions [United Nations General Assembly 1984].

Human rights bodies, authorities on social justice around the world, and the national constitutions of sixty-five countries espouse the idea that solitary confinement ought to be abolished, yet some make special allowances when all other options have been exhausted for as short a span of time as possible (McLeod 2009:6-7). These stipulations also include prohibitions on the imposition of solitary confinement upon juveniles and the mentally ill (Kim, Pandergrass, and Zelon 2012:48).

In 2011, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Méndez, called for an international ban on solitary confinement in almost all situations of more than fifteen days, where specific state-initiated safeguards would be in place. Such circumstances mentioned included specific protection deemed necessary due to prisoner sexual orientation or gang-related danger. Méndez stated at the United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee, "Segregation, isolation, separation, cellular, lockdown, Supermax, the hole, Secure Housing Unit [...] whatever the name, solitary confinement should be banned by States as a punishment or extortion technique [...] Solitary confinement is a harsh measure which is contrary to rehabilitation, the aim of the penitentiary system" (UN News Centre 2011). Méndez and others who support his argument cite the widely documented range of adverse physical and psychological impacts associated with spatial constriction, as well as the implications of lack of human contact and sensory stimulation as reasons to abolish the long-standing practice.

In the United States, advocates for the termination of prison isolation practices argue that the practice stands in direct violation of inmates' Constitutional Rights. Some significant court rulings in cases such as *Wilson v. Seiter*, *Farmer v. Brennan*, *Madrid v. Gomez*, and *Bono v. Saxbe* overruled charges that the Constitution had been violated (McLeod 2009:6). For instance in *Bono v. Saxbe*, inmates stated that the isolation imposed upon them violated the Eighth Amendment in that it "constitute[d] cruel and unusual punishment because conditions [were] in and of themselves impermissible types of punishment and because [they] constitute[d] punishment [that was] not proportionate to the severity of the relevant offense" (McLeod 2009:7). However, the Court dismissed these charges citing the lack of overcrowding, cleanliness of the prison facility, as well as

opportunities for exercise and reading (McLeod 2009:7). Other advocates for the ban on solitary confinement in the United States cite violations of the First Amendment relating to checking governmental abuses of power and citizen rights to think and debate political, social, and spiritual matters (McLeod 2009:10). Some argue that the Thirteenth Amendment is also violated in a penal system with inmate isolation trends so demarcated along racial lines that it is effectively a form of modern day slavery, according to Bonnie Kerness (personal interview, October 13, 2013). Further detail regarding the Amendments in question and important court cases will be addressed in the following chapter.

On the other side of the debate, advocates of solitary confinement argue that the practice is necessary to preserve prison property and the orderly running of facilities. As of September 2013, existing policies in states, such as Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Oklahoma, Hawaii, Vermont, and Indiana, explicitly determine the necessity of isolation practice from the standpoint of security for prison staff and collective prison populations (Metcalf et al. 2013:Appendix A). One correctional officer stated, “We need to contain the bigger disruptions [...] [Solitary confinement] has a positive effect with the general population and it has the negative deterrence of [taking the prisoner out of] the general population” (Janson 2004:27-28). The system is meant to house the inmates most prone to violence as examples of bad prisoners to other inmates who choose not to follow the rules, as well as those that require isolation for their own protection (Zucker, dir. 2012).

Prisons are designed to make an impression and create a hard environment for these inmates to reconsider their actions and be motivated to complete the given program to get out of isolation. Some Commissioners of Corrections argue that certain prisoners



do not need to be in isolation units, but the units exist and the existing infrastructure is better utilized than left empty (Mehta et al, dir. 2012). Others argue that the bigger problem lies in the capacity of prisons to provide adequate rehabilitative resources to prepare inmates for release rather than the actual conditions of isolation themselves (Mehta et al, dir. 2012). The next section will take an in-depth look at how these conditions and the practice of prison segregation, itself, has evolved over the course of history within the United States.

### **Historical Legacy of Solitary Confinement**

Solitary confinement, as a prison practice, has been imposed on people from monks of medieval times through to the present day. Within the walls of monasteries, isolation was believed to serve as a form of rehabilitation for disobedience and negligent behavior in duties, yet it later came into common use within prisons (Brook 2003). Its use as a tool for prisoner rehabilitation is documented with its resurgence in the Western world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. One text, “The Prisoner’s Companion, Containing Religious and Moral Advice, Adapted to Persons in Solitary Confinement,” offers prisoners advice in learning how to renounce their evil and roguish ways in favor of repentance. The text was published in London in 1785 and sold thereabouts by bookseller, Robert Dodsley. The introductory section is addressed to a Mr. Jonas Donway, Esq, on December 27, 1784. It describes the pains of the author to aid isolated prisoners in their reclamation in the eyes of God and those of England. The text draws on a joint physically and mentally isolating and educational program. It is heavily embedded

with religious instruction to return such prisoners to the community as reformed souls and eventually deliver them to heaven (Dodsley 1785:x).

There are specifications for the treatment of prisoners and expected actions on the part of prisoners in following this system. Goalers, or prison guards, are instructed to have short conversations with prisoners, prisoners are expected to be provided with books to further their education, and they are told to see the charity and kindness in their confinement for the time to think on their actions. Justice and the power of the law to always overtake the vice of mankind are referenced so that the prisoner understands his subordinate position (Dodsley 1785:1). The author writes to the prisoner audience:

The great object of your being kept alone, is to preserve you from bad company, and to give you an opportunity for thought and reflection...and to recall to your heart the love of honesty, and a sense of virtuous obligation...Let me once more entreat you to view your solitary imprisonment in this light, and not imagine that it is intended as an additional hardship and severity to punish or distress you.  
[Dodsley 1785:19]

The publication offers advice and additional reading materials to supplement its words, and displays how criminality was seen as able to be absolved. Yet, an innovative system of criminal rehabilitation and later punishment utilizing solitary confinement was pioneered in the United States in the following century. This system would change the use of solitary confinement around the world within the course of the last several centuries.

In the United States, the appearance of solitary confinement within prisons appeared shortly following the end of the Revolutionary War (Brook, 2003). It coincided with the rise of large-scale mental institutions (Grassian 2006:339). Both institutional systems operated on the premise that healing could be gained through inner reflection. The pervasive thought surrounded the removal of the individual from the general

citizenry to “be enabled to know his own true nature,” and in the case of the prisoner, to be provided with significant protection from other prisoners (Grassian 2006:39). Early eighteenth century prisons were “holding pens” for people of a variety of ages, genders, and levels of criminal activity, known to be fraught with violence on the part of prison staff. Yet, none other than some of America’s founding fathers planted the first real seed for this revolutionary system, although as a concept, it was introduced during the European Enlightenment era (Eastern State Penitentiary “Timeline” 2014).

In 1787, Benjamin Franklin and other notable members, including founder, Dr. Benjamin Rush were members of The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners, now known as the Pennsylvania Prison Society. They proposed a revolutionary idea for a new type of prison that would set a global precedent in prison architecture (Eastern State Penitentiary “History of Solitary Confinement” 2014). The proposed system of total isolation among prisoners was piloted in a sixteen-cell house in the Walnut Street Jail in 1790. The results of this trial ultimately resulted in the necessary funding from the Pennsylvania Legislature to build on a much larger scale. The first of these large structures was that of what became known as the first penitentiary with its design based in penitence and labor for committed sins against others and against society. (Eastern State Penitentiary “History of Solitary Confinement” 2014).

Early Quaker beliefs in the power of isolation to enable inmates to reflect on “bad ways, repent, and even reform them[selves]” fueled the new manner of thinking about rehabilitation efforts for prisoners (Hresko 2006:2). The Quakers withdrew support for the penitentiary system in the mid-1800s after establishment at Eastern State (Hresko 2006:3). They cited its unproductivity as a correctional strategy coupled with exhibition

of psychological damage on the part of prisoners, according to Bonnie Kerness (personal interview September 11, 2013). Despite the role of the Quakers in the launch of the penitentiary system, Quaker organizations, like the AFSC, today support the abolition movement with regards to prison isolation based on strong belief in the “Light of God in every person, rendering each individual a person of worth who deserves dignity and respect” (Lowen and Isaacs 2007:9).

### **Innovations in Prison Architectural Design**

The first penitentiary was designed by British architect, John Haviland, and was opened as Eastern State in Philadelphia in October 1829 after eight years of construction (Eastern State Penitentiary “Timeline” 2014). It was in 1829 that the use of masks, single recreation cells, and door feed slots to minimize contact between inmates and all other people were introduced. In the next three years, three blocks of cells two stories high had been built with four more to be eventually constructed (Eastern State Penitentiary “Timeline” 2014). Haviland described the penitentiary as a “forced monastery,” with Gothic exterior architecture, high ceilings, and frightening medieval design elements (Eastern State Penitentiary “General Overview” 2014). The type of construction and strict rules upheld at Eastern State formed the basis for the Philadelphia System model.

The prison was also influenced by the Panopticon prison design, created by British philosopher, Jeremy Bentham. As discussed in “Walking in the City”: “There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can “invoke” or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in- And this inverts the

schema of the *Panopticon*” (De Certeau 1984:108). The Panopticon incorporated a circular design with a centrally placed guard tower so all cells could be observed, invoking the meaning of the word itself as “all seeing” (Felluga 2011). The design is described by Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* as a mechanism for power and control. The Panopticon is:

polyvalent in its applications, it serves to reform prisoner, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used. [Foucault 1995:205]

This architectural system, was partially implemented at Eastern State where hallways were designed to expand outwards from a central observatory, yet it did not enable the total surveillance from all angles without inmates’ knowledge. Many prisons constructed in the later decades of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, such as the ADX supermax facility in Florence, Colorado, contain more technologically advanced surveillance, radiating pods of cells, and central observation towers that are more in line with the Panopticon’s original purposes (ADPSR “Prison Design and Control” 2013). When comparing the architectural blueprints of ADX and Eastern, there are many striking design similarities, according to Bonnie Kerness (personal interview, September 11, 2013).

The Philadelphia System model, in addition to the model developed at Auburn State and Sing Sing Prisons in New York, served as the blueprints for almost all additional structures built in the remainder of the nineteenth century (Grassian 2006:341).

The system based in New York ran upon a less rigid set of rules, which enabled inmates the ability to work and exercise together (Grassian 2006:342). In 1826, Auburn State warden, Gershom Powers recounted the passage of a law through the New York State Legislature that prisoners were to be housed in solitary confinement without the opportunity to work, further limiting how prisoners' time was allowed to be spent (Toch 2003:221). The twentieth century saw the rise of over three hundred prisons based off these two models in South America, Europe, Russia, China, Japan, and within British colonized regions (Eastern State Penitentiary "General Overview" 2014). The penitentiary had been effectively exported as an intellectual product.

These revolutionary prison models sparked widespread interest from people around the world, with thousands visiting in the mid 1800s every year. These included famous politicians and intellectual minds. Eastern State was toured in the late 1820s and 1830s by the likes of the Marquis de La Fayette, French Commissioners, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, Charles Dickens (Eastern State Penitentiary "Timeline" 2014), and Prussian Nicholas Julius with varying perceptions on the new model (Grassian 2006:340). French visitors wrote of the Philadelphia System with high praise, and questioned whether any other strategy which "hands over the prisoner to all the trials of solitude, leads him through reflection to remorse, through religion to hope, and makes him industrious by the burden of idleness" could be more valuable (Gumbel 2013). On the other hand, some visitors were appalled by the symptoms of mental illness exhibited by the prisoners they encountered on tours. One such figure was Charles Dickens, whose 1842 visit to Eastern State, was recounted in a travel journal, entitled "American Notes for Circulation." Dickens wrote:

In its intention I am well convinced that it is kind, humane, and meant for reformation; but I am persuaded that those who designed this system of Prison Discipline, and those benevolent gentleman who carry it into execution, do not know what it is that they are doing.... I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body; and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye...and it extorts few cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment in which slumbering humanity is not roused up to stay.  
[Eastern State Penitentiary “General Overview” 2014]

Dickens was not alone in condemning the system, including others like poet, Harry Hawser (Gumbel 2013). Increasing criticism of the penitentiary system sparked wide debate on its ethical and moral standing throughout the nineteenth century.

### **Decline of the Penitentiary System**

A significant ruling from the Supreme Court in the case, *In Re Medley*, came in 1890, and made an important declaration on the penitentiary system (McLeod 2009:2). Justice Miller described the severity of the two systems and recounted documented psychological effects such as the “semi-fatuous state,” propensity towards violent behavior, and increased rates of suicide, lack of general reformed character, and inability for inmates to serve as productive members of society” (Haney 2003:151). By this point, long-term stays in confinement were on the decline, and the system failed to retain significant support by the later decades of the 1800s. The Philadelphia system was discarded at Eastern State in 1913, although it continued to operate until 1970. It has been open to the public for tours and historical programming since 1994 (Eastern State Penitentiary “Timeline” 2014).

Many other United States prisons ceased to function in the penitentiary system around the beginning of the twentieth century, with the exception of notable institutions like Alcatraz off the nation's West Coast. More violent or problematic inmates were transferred to a wider range of facilities in order to expand the concentration of their influence (Hresko 2006:3). However, the latter half of the twentieth century was characterized by significant social and political unrest, an important context to consider in the development of the next wave of solitary confinement use, according to "The Hidden History" (Kerness 2013). The Civil Rights Movement, Korean War, and the Vietnam War preceded and coincided with a period of mass incarceration beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the 1980s (Wacquant 2002:385). This took place despite declining crime rates (Rhodes 2001:65). Problems with overcrowding in prisons across the country began at this time and continue to be a feature of the system today (Kupers 2008:1007).

### **From Rehabilitation to Punishment: The Advent of Supermax**

Following this growth came a resurgent wave of solitary confinement in United States prisons during the 1980s (Hresko 2006:3). Administrative segregation units became more widespread for the lockdown of "politically dissident prisoners" while management control units housed inmates feared to be threats for their political beliefs who had not committed infractions or broken prison rules, according to "The Hidden History" (Kerness 2013). An important shift in the extent of the practice of solitary confinement occurred with an incident at the maximum-security federal prison in Marion,



Illinois. In 1983, a riot broke out at the prison during which an inmate and two corrections officials were killed. In order to quell any further violence, a policy of prison-wide lockdown was implemented, in which all prisoners were subjected to conditions of solitary confinement. This total confinement represented a change in the way isolation practice was viewed. It represented a clear break from earlier notions of solitary confinement as rehabilitation to solitary confinement as criminal punishment.

The technique implemented in Marion did produce a decline in violent behavior among prisoners in this particular institution, and thus it became popularized as a new means of more effectively controlling prison populations (Hresko 2006:3). Prisons built to implement this particular strategy are known as supermax facilities, with at least forty-two are in operation currently around the country. Such prisons have required increasing prison employees and budgets, and have become a major focus of research within prison studies. As a focus, researchers examine the range of impacts described by inmates and reported by prison staff and others working to address issues involving prisons (Wacquant 2002:383). As federally subsidized supermax institutions continue to be built, other forms of isolation units in varying security levels prisons, have come into increasing use, as discussed earlier in this section. Upon examination of the history behind the practice of solitary confinement, the evolution of a widespread industry in Corrections can be witnessed across time and space. The industry is accompanied by increasing opposition to prison isolation coming from an array of disciplines.

In order to understand how individuals become involved in the anti-prison isolation movement, and what kinds of practices they engage in requires in-depth insight into the stories of people connected with the prison reform movement. The body of stories

presented in the succeeding chapter serves to highlight the shared goals and differentiated pathways towards involvement with issues of solitary confinement. These stories provide valuable insight into the nationwide community that exists as part of a social movement in opposition to the practice of solitary confinement. It will be identified and described in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Three: Towards Community Building in Opposition to Solitary Confinement**

*Positive change does not come quickly and demands ongoing effort.  
If we become discouraged we may not attain even the simplest goals.  
With constant, determined application, we can accomplish even the most  
difficult objectives.*

Dalai Lama 2008:134

Sitting in my thesis adviser's office one afternoon, I was discussing the progress of the thesis and looking at the most effective way to bring to light the voices I intended to share. The more we discussed and played with ideas, the more I came to realize that the existence of people in relation to each other was exactly what I had been trying to vocalize. Are these communication habits, working relationships, and organizing and mobilizing techniques not representative of the functioning and further development of a community? The following chapter explores the ways in which a national community of individuals and organizations works to support the abolition of solitary confinement as a prison practice.

In the realm of social justice, forms of social organization play a major role in the emergence of increasingly public discourse on given social issues, as well as the strategies that are employed to push for wider collective action. These efforts often occur at the non-governmental level where ordinary people who represent a wide variety of backgrounds, lifestyles, and fields of interest organize. The aforementioned forms of organization encompass many geographic areas and levels of society, as well as the range

of mobilization tactics employed in search of greater social change. The community is one such form that is highly ambiguous and regularly disputed by scholars across many fields. It is compared often with the network and distinguished in relation to additional forms of social organization, such as the state, nation, or society. The connection between communities and social movements is also considered when examining how people mobilize and participate in social initiatives.

The United States has a long history of community organization and activism on a wide array of issues experienced at local and national levels. These issues range from social to moral to politically based concerns, including protesting for and against corporate corruption, racial inequalities and civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, fair labor, immigration laws, healthcare services, and mass hunger and poverty. Issues of prison reform number among such initiatives, including solitary confinement. Solitary confinement provides an important framework through which to examine a particular community built around its abolition.

### **Defining Community**

There is much dispute over the nature of the term, community, and its attributes. In one sense of the term, a community can be identified as consisting of groups of people who identify with one another along certain lines including spatial proximity, economic stance, familial relations, cultural identifications, ethnicity, racial identity, and gender identity (Callan 2014:114). In many communities, relationships of reciprocal commitment that bind people into cohesive social units are based in shared trust,

continual interactions, and mutual engagement in activities and organizations (Allee 2000:5). However, this is not the case across all communities.

In some communities, associations and affiliations connect people, but these individuals may not live in close contact. For instance, as a college student, I live within a dormitory community that is connected by residence within the localized borders of the building. Yet, I am also a part of a wider campus community that is further spread out but still shares general residence on the college grounds and work based therein. Some members of the Connecticut College community may share additional social identifications, employment positions, beliefs, or hail from the same towns and cities, although these shared aspects will not be universal among all members. I also consider myself to be a part of a national community of figure skating coaches and enthusiasts, joined not necessarily by geographic proximity or any form of social identification, but rather by a shared love of the sport and a desire to foster more American figure skaters. In this case, the community is centered on an investment in and passion.

Communities can also consist of people who have common interests, shared systems of beliefs, political convictions, and shared morals, ethics, and principles. Most authors on the subject of communities do agree that people identify with specific communities due to a “sense of belonging emerging from mutual interaction, a common project and/or imagined identity and the active involvement of some of its members” (Callan 2014:114). It is this mutual concern and passion that feed the sharing of knowledge and expertise. These in turn fuel community interactions and organization around issues that appeal to the specific interests of the community’s member base.

Thus, differences in the member base and goals of communities based in practice, purpose, and interest versus communities based in knowledge or episteme may become apparent (Callan 2014:107). Communities of knowledge may be composed of individuals with professional credentials, expertise, and activism efforts in the issues on which they are researching and/or speaking out (Haas 1992:3). These individuals may prefer to meet and discuss in formalized office settings, while other similar groups or communities of purpose, practice, or interest may choose less formalized establishments for work. These may include public locations, member homes, or community meeting places (Callan 2014:114).

Where the opportunity is not present to physically meet, communities might make use of contemporary technologies that enable discussion and organization via Internet chat rooms, social media sites, email chains and groups, video communication programming, telephone conference calls, or group text messaging. According to Randall Pinkette of the Epistemology and Learning Group at the MIT Media Laboratory, Shaw's 1995 theory of social constructionism is directly tied to the use of technologies for information exchange and communication. This theory argues that "individual development cycles are enhanced by shared constructive activity in the social setting, and the social setting is also enhanced by the developmental activity of individuals" (Pinkette 2000:3). Multiple social constructions, such as social relationships, social events, shared physical artifacts, shared social goals, and shared cultural norms and traditions, can be instrumental in the advancement of community interests and goals.

Technological features, which additionally may include Internet bulletins, announcements, and calendars of events, can contribute to the success of community

organizing. Technology is also significant to the mobilization of resources and assets for particular issues relevant and important to the community (Pinkette 2000:4,10). While the setting argued in social constructionism and in sociocultural constructionism, which also takes into account the cultural identity of community members, can be significant to the success of the community, it is not instrumental. Technology can provide an opportunity for community members to get acquainted, stay in touch, and get involved in efforts while functioning in a localized setting or when community members are spread out around a given state, country, or around the world. The varying levels of community building will be further addressed later in this section.

It is clear that communities can serve an important organizing function for human beings around the world, yet they are highly differentiated in terms of what motivates their functioning, what brings people together, the activities in which members participate, and how they organize. Communities can operate, coalesce, and evolve in a fluid manner. They are constantly redefining themselves, as people move in and out of them, bringing with them different lived experiences that inform personal perspectives (Allee 2000:6). These ideas and beliefs can be transmitted to communities in which people live and with which they identify. This may have a profound effect on how communities function, and in situations where social activism is the basis for shared interest, new knowledge may transform mobilizing tactics, the presentation of information, and facilitate discussion and debate.

Additionally, new members in communities may not consistently or personally be acquainted with others with whom they identify, work, or maintain shared interests or beliefs. Members of communities may harbor different levels of activity and vocality

based on individual or organization based desires, which may be related to the nature of community connection building. Some people or groups of people within communities may “have a desire to continue contributing to its efforts while others may seek to gain from involvement” (Allee 2000:7). For some people, levels of involvement and participation may be resultant from a combination of both outlooks. Essentially, groupings of individuals and organizations into communities cannot be viewed as a clear-cut process. According to Amit & Rapport, “sociality is sought, rejected, argued over, realized, interpreted, exploited, or enforced,” thereby complicating the formation and analysis of communities that are ever shifting with temporary and long-term relationships experienced between members (Pink 2008:165). Community members may struggle to overcome obstacles to successful communication by means of language barriers, problems of information transmission, ease of access to one another, and distance, (Anderson 2006:44) yet communities continue to grow and prosper. The following section delves more deeply into the relationship of locality to community, and begins to look at how a community around the abolition of solitary confinement has evolved.

### **Communities: Disputing Notions of Locality**

In order to break down the complexity of relationships and activities among participants involved in contemporary efforts to abolish the practice of solitary confinement, it is important to address how the community functions. Some scholars argue that a community is a strictly local entity, predicated upon face-to-face contact between members. DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge emphasize that communities are



“places of daily life in which people are fed, care for one another, and raise children. They are sites of daily convenience shopping, and the other activities that sustain us” (2012:15). This is true of communities in one sense, but not in all functions of the term. While some communities of cultural tradition or interest additionally do place emphasis upon geographic proximity, many are successful in cultivating collective action and shaping shared political convictions. Researchers can study how communities operate, who makes up their members, and where they are influential while avoiding “the trap of looking for community only in spatially defined ways” (McKether 2011:66). Such is the case when examining the community of individuals and groups organized around the abolition of solitary confinement.

Members of communities that lack a spatial proximity to one another often congregate into offshoot groups, associations, and organizational bodies in order to formalize connections, mobilize participants, and discuss related ideas (DeFilippis, Fisher, Shragge 2012:19). This is one type of organizational method that has proven successful in disseminating information, raising awareness, and encouraging state and federal level change where prison isolation practice is concerned. Such groups can acquire a strong sense of agency and in presenting novel ideas and research. This wielding of a significant degree of power can benefit coordination efforts for effecting wider social change on given issues of social justice (Haas 1992:2-3).

Some groups may be based in a particular social setting in order to increase the support base for their initiatives. In this context, *social setting* is defined as “an environment in which numerous forces, particularly those stemming from an individual’s relationship to others, act upon people who are located in that setting” (Pinkette 2000:2).

Yet, active efforts and participation in individual groups or organizations may occur without the necessity of forming personal connections with all other like-minded groups. According to Anderson, communities arose over the course of history only when “substantial groups of people were in a position to think of themselves as living parallel lives to those of other substantial groups of people” (Anderson 2006:188). This concept applies directly to the contemporary community based in the abolition of prison isolation in that people across the United States are involved in a wide range of activities to pique public interest in the cause. These activities may occur at the local level, but the goal is to connect with other like-minded groups, combine knowledge and efforts, and examine the most productive ways to appeal to public and political sentiments.

The groups and associations that come to form the support base in communities may be representative of many fields of study in which shared interest in given social issues manifests. When examining the community in support of the abolition of solitary confinement, this is certainly the case. Supporters of abolishing prison isolation hail from many fields. Some of the primary fields in which individuals and organizations are working on issues of isolation policy include anthropology, sociology, psychology, gender and sexuality studies, architecture, criminology, law, visual arts, journalism, film studies, ethnic and race-based studies, and human rights.

Community mobilization efforts are also based in desire for varying levels of change. DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge argue that several of these types include “adoptive/reformist” and “radical/revolutionary” (2012:22). The adoptive/reformist form of mobilization is described as general acceptance of customary beliefs with the desire to make subtle changes. There is more emphasis on the reformation of overwhelming

inequalities so that that status quo is better maintained. On the other hand, the radical/revolutionary mobilization makes use of the linguistic traditions and community locations as the foundations for effecting deeper social form that have great impact upon people's relationships (DeFilippis, Fisher, Shragge 2012:22).

When addressing the nature of the community in favor of abolishing solitary confinement, the goals of the radical/revolutionary approach are more relevant. The impact of solitary confinement is widespread and puts a strain upon the relationships between and among isolated inmates, their family members, friends, and advocates. Relationships are impacted by infrequent visiting or communication opportunities and prison suicides of which several studies show at least half occur in situations of solitary confinement (United States Senate Judiciary Committee 2014). Localized communities are affected when inmates are released with little or no rehabilitative programming or vocational training to ease them back into the outside world.

Several individuals who testified at the Second Congressional Hearing, "Reassessing Solitary Confinement, II: The Human Rights, Fiscal, and Public Safety Consequences before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee addressed the case of Tom Clements' murder. Mr. Clements, former Chief of Colorado Department of Corrections, was fatally shot outside his home by a former inmate who was disguised as a pizza deliveryman. Evan Ebel was paroled directly from solitary confinement, and less than two months after his release, murdered pizza deliveryman, Nathan Leon, murdered Clements, and then was chased by Texas police until Ebel, himself, was killed in a shootout with police. Clements had cut the use of administrative segregation in Colorado state prisons by forty-seven percent, closed Colorado's new supermax facility, Colorado

State Penitentiary II, and further lowered the population of inmates in solitary to twenty-three percent in barely over two years in the Chief position before his death (Greene 2013).

Paul Herman, a friend and colleague of Clements stated: “Here you had two people, one [Evans] who suffered significantly from solitary confinement and the other [Clements] who was trying to do something about it. If what happened to Tom isn’t the ultimate irony, I don’t know what is” (Greene 2013). Unfortunately, Clements is not the only person to have been killed or harmed by an individual who was incarcerated in isolation. Advocates for the abolishment of the practice are seeking reform, which they feel, will help to decrease and ultimately eliminate such incidences and the strains that isolation puts on a great many people.

The sorts of activities in which community members participate may be undertaken in various fields, yet are also differentiated based on expertise and interests. For instance, in the realm of studying issues related to solitary confinement, speakers across many disciplines may opt to participate or testify in individual or group speaking engagements at lectures, events, or panels before the general public or policy makers. Filmmakers may screen their productions at film festivals in awareness-raising endeavors while artists may host showings of their prison artwork. Architects may design petitions to change prison designs and help facilitate the building of exhibition model isolation cells while professors may encourage their students to debate about issues related to solitary confinement. Psychologists might conduct focused research groups both inside prisons and among recently released inmates to study behavioral and psychological impacts, rehabilitation techniques, and recidivism rates while sociologists might look at the social

and reform movements that have evolved within the United States around prison reform. Some of these activities and others, as they relate to certain fields, will be examined and discussed in far greater detail in the following chapter.

### **Distinguishing Between Community and Network**

Communities and networks are forms of social organization that are often compared in terms of definition and the relationships between the constituents who identify with each form. The distinction is important to this thesis because individuals and organizations connected by shared interest and desire to abolish prison isolation practices are deemed to be members of a nation-wide community as opposed to a network. Members of a variety of places, classes, races, and genders, maintain communities, which is also the case with people who are connected through networks. In both forms, something “positive, creative, productive, and satisfying” is created that forms bonds between people and enables them to speak up for what they believe in (Pink 2008:170).

However, networking does not necessarily require that people share a common goal or belief, but rather a set of interests, which can become increasingly focused into communities. Networks are webs of connection, interaction, and communication that are often fixated on the passage and collection of information to members, and in this sense can connect communities through endeavors such as social media, shared contacts, or pre-existing interpersonal relationships (Allee 2000:6-7). In this way, networks can be helpful in promoting community connectivity and a sense of shared drive for social

change (Neal and Neal 2013). Although there is great overlap between members of networks and associated communities terms of connectivity, one major difference concerns levels of familiarity. New and longer-term members of communities do not always know other members of that same community with whom they are working and collaborating while it is far more common for networks to consist of members who are actively acquainted (Allee 2000:7). A network between prospective applicants to jobs in various fields or social networking between people interested in similar art forms or sports teams, for instance, may turn into communities. Such communities may have a shared desire to say bring a beloved performer to a certain venue or be supportive for young people looking for teaching positions. However, these individuals must recognize opportunities for future collaboration that can expand modes of communication and accomplish greater changes for a community to coalesce.

Networks can facilitate internal information collection and distribution. This can create greater depth than mere sets of relationships without formal initiatives to hold network connections together. The production of shared tools for the organization of protests, meetings, and collaboration can also transform a network into a community (Allee 2000:6). This likely took place in forming the community of people opposed to prison isolation practices by means of email chains to spread the word about events, pamphlets to more concisely and widely disseminate information, or Internet spaces for resource collection, for instance. Although these terms are widely interchanged, there is a difference between them, and one that is relevant to this discussion.

## Communities and Social Justice Movements

The major challenge within communities is to create initiatives and projects that go beyond local reform efforts to connect individuals and groups across town and state borders. It is through such cooperation that major social change can be made (DeFillipis, Fisher, Shragge 2010:32, 43). The efforts taken within social movements can arise from communities “where existing associational groups or networks of the aggrieved community take the first steps towards collective action” (McKether 2011:66). The deep levels of connectivity, which spawn these movements over beliefs in altering power relations among social actors, operate by implicit or explicit cultural and political factors. The impact of such movements includes interest and awareness raising efforts, decision-making, and enhanced socialization among interested parties (Buechler 1995:451).

*A social movement* is defined as:

a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests, and for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilization, or the threat of mobilization, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power. They are further distinguished from other collectivities, such as voluntary associations and clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society, or the relative position of the group in society. [Scott 1990:6]

Many contemporary movements emerged or were revived from earlier periods of activism in the late nineteenth century and again in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. These included civil rights, women’s rights, and gay rights (Scott 1990:13). These also include prisoner rights and prison reform. It is important to recognize that the community opposed to the practice of solitary confinement operates from within a national and transnational movement to end the use of isolation in prisons. It is also part

of a wider prison reform movement that looks into other perceived violations of prisoner rights including death penalty use, overcrowding, and the increasing rates of trying juveniles as adults.

Some scholars constitute certain social and social justice movements as *new social movements*. They are defined as “a diverse array of collective actions that have presumably displaced the old social movement of proletarian revolution associated with classical Marxism” (Buechler 1995:442). These movements address politics, philosophies, and cultural traditions, as well as modes of identity such as ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, whereby the self-determination of participants as citizens is emphasized over ties to localities (Buechler 1995:442-443). Italian theorist, Alberto Melucci, described how new sites of conflict form the basis for new social movements. These are sites that impact the lives of everyday people (Buechler 1995:446). Other scholars, such as Dalton, Kuechler, and Burklin, argue that new social movements draw on a far wider array of social participants of a variety of races, ethnicities, gender, and classes, as well as values and goals for social change based on the nature of the movement as identity or issue driven (Buechler 1995:256).

I interviewed a Professor of Anthropology, who prefers to remain nameless in this thesis. She classified criminal justice as a new social movement where a great deal of networking takes place within communities dedicated to certain issues of social justice, including solitary confinement. The professor described the dominance of prison practices particularly in the last forty years, and discussed how people became involved in this new movement from various fields. She stated:

Someone may wear an environmental hat and not think about the human consequences in urban design, prison design. They may not have an interest in



prisons, but they are affected by the prisons, which creates a general interest from another angle where shared opinions on prison abolition may be found. [Professor of Anthropology, personal interview, February 26, 2014]

In addition to the differentiated piquing of interests for community members, the professor described the benefits of knowing about the activities and efforts of others on a daily and weekly basis in close proximity and across the United States. The professor described her experience with a prestigious fellowship opportunity. Through this experience, the professor noted how dialogue and knowledge sharing between fellows permeates down to the public as fellows start their own organizations, bring other affiliated organizations into discussions and activism efforts, and enhance the chain of connections. Mr. Raphael Sperry, who attained a Soros Justice Fellowship coming from criminal justice reform within the architectural sphere, similarly described the process of sharing opinions about the work of each fellow at conferences. He also mentioned how some fellows are motivated to activism efforts because of a moral belief, additional personal reasons, or intellectual reasons. Some members of the anti-solitary movement argue that this sort of connectivity at the individual and organizational level, both informal and formal, is an integral part of new social movements. For the purposes of this thesis, I draw on elements of social movements and new social movements, and focus on the scope of the community itself.

## **National Level Community Building**

Communities can exist at many levels: local, state-level, national, and transnational. Amit and Rapport point out how communities have historically been identified by connections to particular places in which the location is analyzed over the object of the research. Within anthropology, it wasn't until the 1950s that scholars started to separate the lives of the "other," or cultural groupings of tribal peoples, from notions of their isolation, assumed lack of change over time, and ideas regarding resounding harmony among them. Max Gluckman and anthropologists from the Manchester School were among the first to confirm the error in the presumption that these communities of people did not face the same sorts of internal fluid changes as experienced in Western societies. In the 1980s and early 1990, scholars, namely Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, began the conceptual transition to thinking about the "mechanisms through which national communities had come to be imagined in the minds of their members" (Callan 2014:114). The field of transnational studies emerged, following the work of these individuals, which redefined conventional beliefs about inclusion. Scholars within the last fourteen years, such as Appadurai, Beck, Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, have all questioned the way that academia has traditionally approached the nation, in particular (Callan 2014:114).

The United States of America has had a relatively short, yet tumultuous history full of community formation and demolition, state creation and succession, and re-aligning of borders. These have occurred along all sorts of social lines, namely racial, ethnic, and gendered rights, state rights, and religious rights. As the first female Senator of Texas and

Civil Rights Leader, Barbara Charline Jordan, stated in the 1976 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address, “We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national identity” (Jordan 1976). Such a statement references the continuous search among Americans across time and space for congregation into increasingly widened groups of like-minded people who share similar values, beliefs, passions, and interests. Although it is still a work in progress in this country, as in any, the nation can be “imagined as a community, because regardless of the inequality and exploitation that prevail...the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 2006:7). That comradeship is essential to community building in all senses of the term, whether the community is a group of people connected by spatial circumstance, shared traits or skills, or shared cause.

The concept of searching for collective consciousness amidst great human diversity applies to the emergence of the community dedicated to the abolition of solitary confinement. The anti-solitary community thrives upon its national scale for widespread strides in furthering the cause at the state and federal level. Despite representing different parts of the country and different fields of study, the community is strengthened by an underlying shared sense that something is wrong, and has been for significant time with regards to the waves of prison isolation practice in the American penal system (Callan 2014:108). These individuals believe at varying levels of outrage that solitary confinement is an inhuman or unnecessary practice, and they use that shared conviction to connect with one another.

Professor of Criminology and Law, Keramet Reiter of University of California Irvine, stated in her interview with me that a community of dedicated individuals and

organizations does exist across states and perspectives. She described how she is always thrilled to hear of more people researching and studying issues in prisons such as solitary confinement as prisons implicate so many disciplines. Professor Reiter referenced the well-known independent web-based advocacy project, Solitary Watch, which is advised by individuals representing religious organizations and academic institutions in law and psychology. The project is also advised and carried out by leading members of other activist organizations on the front lines of operations to end the practice of prison isolation. Some of these affiliated organizations and projects include the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) National Prison Project, AFSC's Prison Watch Project and STOPMAX Campaign, Southern Center for Human Rights, The Innocence Project, Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), and the Prison Policy Initiative (Solitary Watch 2014).

While the makeup of leading members of Solitary Watch is quite diverse in both areas of expertise and personal connections, the project itself has many affiliations and advocates among other groups around the nation. The project's website has a list of advocates that has grown tremendously in the last few years and continues to grow while maintaining a core support group, according to Keramet Reiter (personal interview, January 23, 2014). The advocate and affiliate groups have the opportunity to gain increased support for individual initiatives from the publicity on the media output of other sites, but more importantly such connections lay the groundwork for significant collaboration between groups and individuals which works to strengthen the community in shared efforts on approaching policy makers and departments of corrections. For instance, in my own conversations with individuals from the AFSC, I was referred to

several other people who I was able to speak with for this thesis. Bonnie Kerness knew or knew of these individuals to varying degrees, and it was through her that I ultimately came to speak with Ojore Lutalo and Raphael Sperry. It was through Mr. Sperry that I was directly connected with Aseem Mehta and with whom I shared a connection to Keramet Reiter. My adviser for this thesis is well acquainted with the Professor of Anthropology with whom I ultimately spoke. Without the webs of connections forged within this community, sometimes extended over great distances, this thesis would not exist in present form and the opportunities for research and resource collaboration among community members would be greatly impeded.

Connections may not always be easy to produce across time zones and fields of study, yet they are possible and from my personal experience happening with great frequency. Professor Reiter, stated in her interview with me that “the community has to stick together,” in order to make strides towards lessening the frequency of use, debasing the notion that isolated prisoners represent the worst of the worst, enhancing rehabilitative programming, and ultimately eliminating the practice all together among other shared goals. In my research into the work of my interviewees, I found that almost all of the individuals with whom I had the opportunity to speak or correspond were very open about their own stories of involvement with issues of solitary confinement. It was not generally difficult to acquire contact information, and as discussed above, I received many referrals to connect with other experts in their fields or line of work. I experienced some minimal problems with phone connectivity and the occasional difficulty with setting up phone interviews due to diverging schedules or time differences, but found that

email was also a successful mode of communication if needed or preferred by the interviewee.

In personally working with these individuals, some of who had never met, I found that many were still friendly with one another. I noticed a resounding interest in what other members of the community are doing, even just from this pool of members. Despite distance and differences in how each individual became involved with the anti-solitary community and general prison reform movement, the strength of working relationships and shared desire for social change is evident. As DiFillippis, Fisher, and Shragge state, “Community efforts must have an analysis of the processes and relations that cause injustices in their communities, and of the institutions that play vital roles in those processes” (2012:33). It is through critical analysis and information sharing that community members involved with issues of solitary confinement can learn about what efforts are undertaken in other fields. There is great power and passion in the individual voices of community members. The following sections will undertake an in-depth look into the stories of six interviewees and the sort of action and research currently undertaken in respective fields and disciplines.

## **Chapter Four: Voices From Inside the Prison and Out**

# Ojore Nuru Lutalo

Ex-Prisoner and Activist

Figure 2 “Notice of Classification Decision”

**Department of Corrections  
NEW JERSEY STATE PRISON  
NOTICE OF CLASSIFICATION DECISION  
ROUTINE REVIEW**

NAME: Lutalo, Ojore NUMBER: 59860/901548

The MCURC had reviewed evidence and considered the testimony relative to Inmate Lutalo his routine review, pursuant to 10A:5-2.10. This evidence includes:

- 1. Documents supporting initial placement decision
- 2. Disciplinary Reports
- 3. Program Participation Report
- 4. Social Services Report
- 5. Medical Report
- 6. Psychological Interview Report
- 7. Special Investigation Division Report
- 8. Compliance with revised MCU placement phases
- 9. Housing Reports

**Inmate Statements / Comments**

“I’m<sup>4</sup> being persecuted and discriminated against. You feel that my affiliation with the Black Liberation Army and the Anarchist Black Cross Foundation poses a problem. I’d like to know what’s the problem? The State Police, FBI, and Homeland Security are aware of it. What concerns do Administration have with my political affiliation? In 2002, I was released into GP with the same affiliation.

**Based on the above the MCURC has determined the following, which Justifies the decision of the committee:**

The MCURC notes your concerns regarding your feelings of persecution and discrimination based on your political affiliation. The Committee continues to show concern regarding your admitted affiliation with the Black Liberation Army and the Anarchist Black Cross Foundation. Your radical views and ability to influence others poses a threat to the orderly operations of this Institution. Furthermore, you have yet to complete any of the necessary programs required for Consideration of release from the Management Control Unit. Your actions Continue to pose a threat to the safety and security of any correctional facility.

*Note:* Partial Report from the Department of Corrections signed on February 28, 2008. Copy provided by Ojore Lutalo.

<sup>4</sup> The primary document from which this partial copy was taken contains a grammatical mistake with no end quotation mark in the first paragraph. The mistake is reflected as it originally appears.



*August 26, 2009.* Ojore Lutalo left Trenton State Penitentiary a free man after twenty-eight years behind prison walls. He had served the maximum sentence for convictions in an armed bank robbery and shoot-out with police (King, prod. 2010). With the exception of an arrest in January 2010 for an incident of reported terrorist threats aboard an Amtrak train in La Junta, Colorado in which charges were dropped, Ojore has been out of prison and sharing his story (Stahl 2014). Ojore has been involved with politics and activism since the mid-1970s, affiliating with politically based organizations that operate along beliefs in extreme racial injustices. Ojore describes his associations with the Black Liberation Army in *In My Own Words*:

At that time, when they made the Association, I felt that it was an honor for me to be associating with a grouping of sisters and brothers who took a stance to stand up to America's aggression in relationship to uh you know poor black people. And I feel that today, that it's an honor for me to be associated with sisters and brothers like this... Well Black Liberation Army is an organization that believe they have a human right to oppose aggression with aggression. As for particulars, you would have to read their literature. Cuz I'm not a Black Liberation Army member so I can't speak for them per say. Personally and politically I'm opposed to dictatorships of any description, any political belief... I believe that people are intelligent enough to govern their own lives, to make their own decisions without somebody collecting untold billions of dollars in taxes, telling you what should be, what shouldn't be. And then most organizations of the left end and right they want to repress. They have power ambitions. They power hungry. Money hungry. And they'll do anything to retain that particular power. They don't settle with the lower class people, they make decisions for them. And I feel that's wrong. And that's why I became an anarchist. [Lutalo, dir. 2010]

These affiliations and interest in political groups deemed to be a threat to general prison security landed Ojore in isolation far beyond the time due to him for his committed crimes. Ojore was housed in the MCU within the facility at Trenton beginning on February 4, 1986, according to "The Hidden History" (Kerness 2013). He was sent to the MCU with ten other individuals, all of whom were released with the exception of himself. The unit held individuals who were labeled as dangerous and with the potential

to try and organize the prison community with radical beliefs. Ojore described the conditions of his isolation as oppressive and punitive.

Figure 3  
Ojore Lutalo at “Behind Enemy Lines”



*Note:* Ojore Lutalo prepares for his question and answer session at “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art” on April 16, 2014. Photo taken by the author.

*October 10, 2013.* I dialed the phone number I had received from Ojore’s close friend at the AFSC’s New Jersey Office, Bonnie Kerness. I had set up the time for us to chat earlier in the week, and was excited to commence with what became one of my first interviews for this thesis, really one of my first-hand experiences with anthropological interviewing in general. I was curious to know how a person can spend extensive time in

constrictive space, and what sorts of activities would provide some respite from the monotony of solitude. I began with my first question: You describe on your Behind Enemy Lines website how you maintained a strict schedule of exercise, meditation, and study. Can you describe this routine more in depth in relation to how you used your space? Ojore replied, “My day would consist of waking up around 3 am or 4 am where I’d wash up. Then I’d exercise and listen to National Public Radio for an hour. You get a quart of cold water to wash up with” (personal interview, October 10, 2013). This routine would continue until about 6 am. The guards would come around and take account of prisoners. Ojore would start then reading the newspaper, a book, or typing. He might listen to the news. He might write letters. He might meditate. He might exercise, doing “push ups and sit-ups, knee bends, you know dips, things of that nature” within his cell, according to “Vegetarian Survival” in *In My Own Words* (Lutalo, dir. 2010). Ojore called the manner in which he structured his time, his cell program, which he says enabled him to survive the conditions of prolonged isolation (King, prod. 2010)

If it was a day to go to the yard, Ojore would be taken out around 7:45 am or 9:45 am for 45 minutes to an hour. In order to leave the cell, he would have to put his hands through a porthole in the door of the cell and be shackled. The yard held steel cages where Ojore could exercise, also alone. If it was not a yard day, Ojore described in *In My Own Words*:

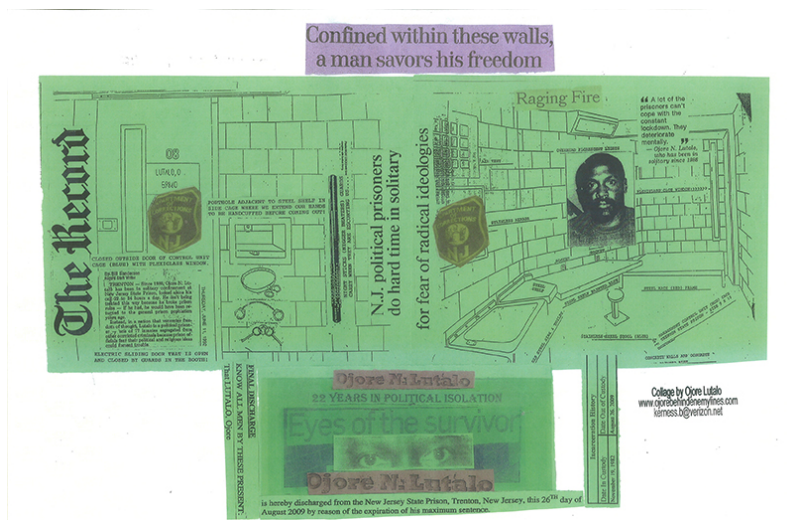
We locked up 24 hours one day and 22 hours the following day and that’s a day in MCU... Well like people in jail population, they have um regular yard scheduled every day. They work. They go to gym, you know which whereas prisoners in MCU we don’t have those activities. We just isolate like I said 24 hours one day and 22 hours the following day. [Lutalo, dir. 2010]

Ojore's cell was 9x7x15 feet. It consisted of a concrete walls, stainless steel bed, toilet, sink, mirror, and shelf painted blue, a narrow Plexiglas window, an air vent, and florescent lighting mounted overhead. The content of the cell is based on Ojore's collage, *Raging Fire*, which is detailed in Figure 4. Ojore described how every facet of the prison from its design, to its strict regulations, to the way it processes inmates is used for punishment. He stated in "Rehabilitation or Punishment" in *In My Own Words*:

"That word don't exist, you know, that doesn't exist in prison systems today- Rehabilitation. Everything in punitive. 100 % punitive. They encourage, they uh restricted our food packages, they restricted our visits, they took away our personal clothing, everything is punitive now. Rehabilitation doesn't exist. It just lock em up and throw away the key. [Lutalo, dir. 2010]

Despite such restrictions and the difficult nature of his conditions, Ojore remained in the MCU for fourteen years.

Figure 4  
*Raging Fire*



Note: Collage produced by Ojore Lutalo. College depicts the conditions of the management control unit at Trenton State Prison in New Jersey.

He was released from solitary confinement into the general prison population in January of 2002. During this time, Ojore maintained an infraction-free disciplinary record, which accorded him the highest rating for demonstrated behavior classified in the state of New Jersey at that time. He was deemed a level “two” (Afran 2008:2-3). After four years of time spent in the general population at Trenton, prison officials sent him back to the management control unit predicated upon the findings of deemed contraband items in his cell following two searches in 2005. The contraband came in the form of newspaper clippings and articles, as well as finished and unfinished posters he had made with such clippings that officials deemed a security threat (Afran 2008:4). Despite the fact that such clippings came from subscriptions to *The New York Times* and the *Trentonian*, which Ojore was entitled to receive, other print media was deemed to be radical and political in nature. These had not been confiscated at the time of their arrival at the prison through the mail (Afran 2008:5-6).

The production of the posters found in Ojore’s cell made from resources he had received played a major role in his incarceration. I brought up the posters in our interview. I asked: Had you been an artist before your entrance into the prison environment? On what levels has art impacted your experience of confinement? To this, Ojore explained that he had not been interested in art prior to prison, but the act of affirming his beliefs through art helped him maintain his sanity. Ojore mentioned that people who had come to hear about his case always asked him to describe how his cell looked. This drew him to craft visuals of isolation in order to educate the public about the physical, emotional, and sensory attributes of solitary confinement. He explained, “I wanted to do the collages, which I call political propaganda, so people can see for

themselves” (Lutalo, personal interview, October 10, 2013). Ojore clarified his reasoning for speaking out about his case, not because he saw sharing his story as talking about something personal. He feels that happened to him could happen to anyone, anyone with certain political or religious convictions, viewed to be a threat to prison functioning.

*August 5, 2005.* Ojore Lutalo was charged with further infractions following the charges for contraband items found in his cell. The new charges, according to his lawyer’s appeal brief, included “perpetrating fraud, deceptions, confidence games, riots or escape plots; operating a business or non-profit enterprise without approval of the Superintendent, and soliciting funds or contributions except as permitted by the Administrator” (Afran 2008:6).

*August 29, 2005.* Ojore was convicted of all charges, forced to hand over the money in his prison account, and lost his typewriter. The appeal filed on his behalf was subsequently rejected. Almost two years later, the convictions made in 2005 were dropped due to lack of reliable evidence, yet Ojore remained in the MCU. The court that acquitted Ojore of the 2005 charges made against him pointed out that Ojore had participated in several interviews filmed at the prison regarding his experiences with life at Trenton. He described how he would have to strip for guards and be physically examined and searched, how he would be required to stick his hands in the porthole in the front door of his cell so restraints could be put on him, and how he would be escorted by two armed guards to the interview room if he was scheduled for one. The restraining, strip search, and guarded walk process would be repeated after the interview was over and before Ojore was returned to his cell.

He pointed out to me in our interview that his case is very well documented due to the aid of the AFSC's Prison Watch Project, which had procured such opportunities to share his story with outside media sources. Ojore described some of these interviews and his motivations for doing them in the "Attica and Prison Reform" section of his documentary, *In My Own Words*. He stated:

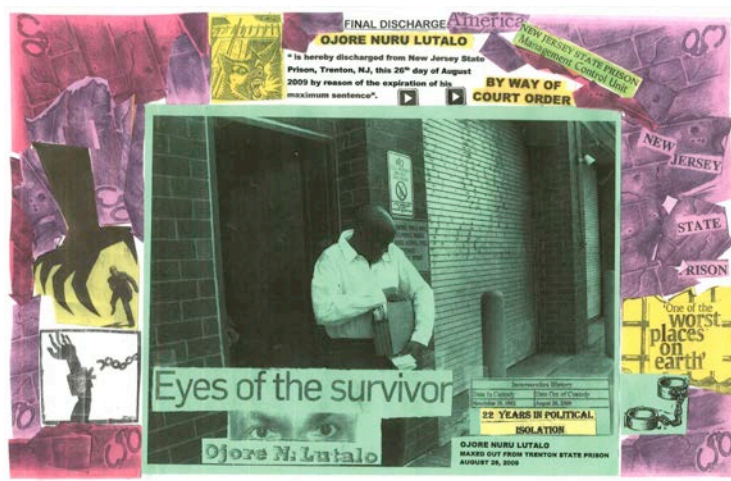
This year, you had Channel Nine interview me and two other prisoners, you know you know I think it was several years ago. *The Record* interviewed me for this particular article here. See but you have a lot of people in communities at large that aren't aware of what's going on inside these prisons so I feel that it's the responsibility of the prisoners inside to reach out to the communities at large and educate them. That's why I'm doing this interview now and that's why I have done others like this in the past. Educationally [Lutalo, dir. 2010]

He went on to explain how Bonnie Kerness from the American Friends Service Committee was responsible for *The Record* and Channel Nine New Jersey news interviews. He explained in "Closing Words That Open Minds" in *In My Own Words* that Bonnie gave him and others in situations similar to his "a human face" as opposed to the image paved by the Administration (Lutalo, dir. 2010). Ojore recommended that I encourage my audience for this thesis to educate themselves through visual media. He recommended that people watch the *Due Process* television taping for New Jersey Public Television or the *Prison Politics* film created by Bonnie Kerness as these are all teaching tools to explain why in Ojore was imprisoned in solitary for twenty two years.

*May 31, 2007*. Ojore remained housed in the management control unit despite the dropping of the 2005 charges against him while these charges continued to be used to support the unwillingness of prison administrators to move him. It was not until November 29, 2007, that the Superior Court of New Jersey first cited Ojore's political affiliations as the reason for his continued incarceration in solitary confinement as

opposed to the 2005 charges. His December 2008 appeal points out that the same wording used in the Notice of Classification Decision from November 29, 2007 was used for his February 28, 2008 and May 29, 2008 Notice of Classification Decisions. The text of the February 28, 2008 Classification is detailed at the beginning of this narrative (Afran 2008:12). Despite appeals put forth by his counsel, Ojore was not released until 2009.

Figure 5  
*Final Discharge*



*Note:* Collage produced by Ojore Lutalo post-release in 2009 depicting the day of his release from prison.

Since his release from prison, Ojore has become involved in activism efforts to share his story and educate the public about the impacts of solitary confinement on prisoners. He works closely with the AFSC, and participates in speaking engagements. He described how he met with Bonnie Kerness at her New Jersey office two times per week in 2013, responds to emails, and sells his collages through his website, "Ojore Lutalo Behind Enemy Lines". Ojore has created and has shown his memoirs DVD, *In My Own Words* at various points, recently at a film festival in New York in 2013. Bonnie and



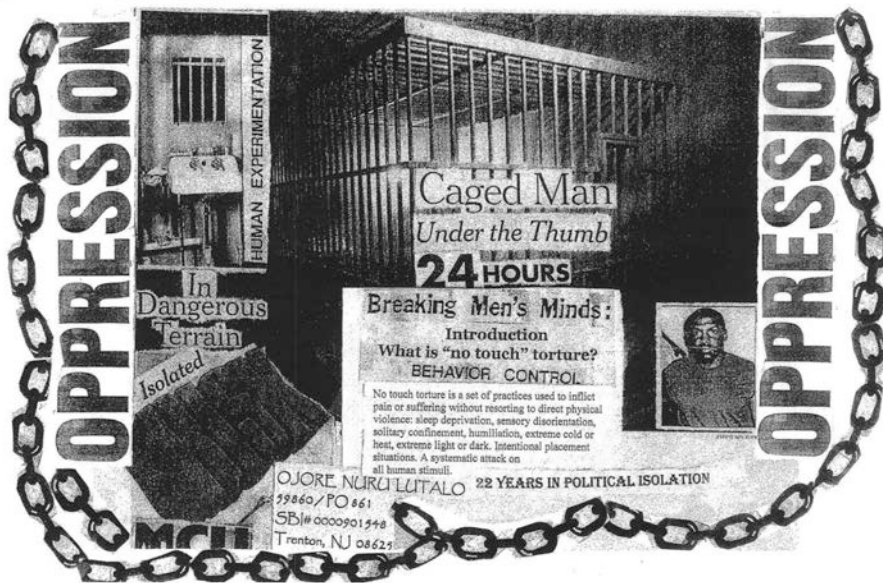
Ojore have taken to giving a presentation together where they exhibit selections of Ojore's collages and speak about issues concerning racism, gender and class-based discrimination, economics, and politics with regards to prison environments. Their presentation will take them to openings at Rutgers and Princeton Universities later this year, and to Connecticut College on April 16, 2014. Bringing the presentation to Connecticut College was Ojore's idea back when we first spoke in October 2013. He maintains that it is his responsibility to teach and make people aware of the range of issues associated with isolating incarcerated individuals. Ojore said without mistaking it: "I am obligated to do this" (personal interview, October 10, 2013).

As I reflected on Ojore's experiences and what I had heard of his story at the time, I was curious about the challenges in acclimating back to life in social settings beyond prison walls after the twenty plus years spent in regular and prolonged seclusion. Ojore described that the biggest challenges were all the new technologies that did not exist before he entered prison. It was difficult getting used to these new technologies. He found it hard to be around so many people again since he had been restricted for so long either alone or with five or six others at the most over the course of his twenty-eight years in prison. He found it difficult to interact with women again after prison and struggled with meeting new people from many different countries. I was struck by Ojore's statement that he never let himself "get institutionalized," which enabled him a relatively easy readjustment in his words to life outside prison (personal interview, October 10, 2013). I wanted to know what he meant by this.

In order to find out, I inquired about the psychological impact isolation can have on a given individual. I was admittedly surprised by Ojore's answer, assuming erroneously

that isolation would damage all people exposed to it on an emotional or psychological level. Ojore said his isolation was different because he was a political prisoner. He understood this, and felt he knew how to survive with this knowledge. He fed off it, and it made him stronger, even though he had what he described as a “strong sense of self and purpose when (he) went in” (Lutalo, personal interview, October 10, 2013). He felt these strong convictions and identification with his identity enabled him to survive in an environment that lacked social stimuli as compared with other prisoners who officials were likewise looking to break through isolation for many reasons. These include everything from gang affiliations, to religious beliefs, to violations of prison rules.

Figure 6  
*Breaking Men's Minds No Touch Torture*



*Note:* Collage produced by Ojore Lutalo regarding the nature of no touch torture an his confinement conditions.

Ojore remarked twice in the course of our interview: “surviving isolation is 90% psychological. The other 10% is much harder to handle and that’s why some people deteriorate mentally” (personal interview, October 10, 2013). In a number of his collages, Ojore addresses the idea that solitary confinement is psychological torture, or no touch torture. Ojore defines the term, no touch torture, in one collage, entitled “No Touch Torture” as:

a set of practices used to inflict pain or suffering without resorting to direct physical, violence; sleep deprivation, sensory disorientation, solitary confinement, humiliation, extreme cold or heat, extreme light or dark. Intentional placement situations, a systematic attack on all human stimuli. [Lutalo n.d]

He focuses on the psychological impact that prison design, cell architectural layout, and prison policies can have on individuals. The psychological element, which will be explored in greater depth within succeeding stories, remains an important tool for prison officials. It is one that the community seeking to do away with solitary confinement and those a part of the wider prison reform movement believe precipitates grounds for the abolition of controversial prison policies like isolation.

Before we ended our interview Ojore probed me in a way that imprinted immensely upon my mind. He wanted me to challenge me to relate more personally to the idea of isolation by trying to assess my sense of self. He asked me if I have ever been depressed or have had low self-esteem. I answered that I had never experienced what I believed to be depression but absolutely have had low self-esteem. Ojore then asked me how I dealt with that low self-esteem when experienced. I told him that my figure skating is my creative and athletic outlet to which I can turn to in those instances to make myself feel better. Ojore explained that having a creative outlet is how I recognize what my problems are which indicates that I have a sense of myself and know how to mitigate

those negative feelings. He said that it would be for those reasons that I would be able to survive solitary confinement (Lutalo, personal interview, October 10, 2013). I found this incredibly interesting and thought provoking. I thank him all the more for helping me to better place myself in some of my darkest places to imagine how they might build me up a stronger woman.

## **Five Omar Mualimm-ak**

**Ex-Inmate & Activist**

*You know when you're young and you're a kid, you always envision yourself in solitude as something good. You know, think of superman when he has his fortress of solitude, and no matter what he goes through in his life, and socially, and the emotions of that, he can always escape to this place that's peaceful and calming and nobody else is there. I mean that is the absolute worst description*

Five Mualimm-ak "One Man's Story" n.d

*September 9, 2013.* After just a few Internet searches for organizations active on combating solitary confinement, I came upon PDF sources published by the AFSC. I clicked on the links for several of these and noticed that *Torture in United States Prisons: Evidence of Human Rights Violations*, came out of the Northeast region and the Survivor's Manual was compiled and edited in Newark, NJ. After searching the organization's website for further information on their various regional offices, I came across the webpage for the New York Office. It became immediately clear as I clicked on link after link, that solitary confinement is a major issue of the AFSC's Healing Justice Program based in the New York metro area. There was a contact email listed so I sent in my thesis proposal accompanied by an email introducing myself, explaining my research goals, and reaching out to anyone who might speak to me. I specified my desire to communicate on work with post-solitary inmates on rehabilitative efforts, work with inmates while they are still in confinement, and with groups that are active on prisoners' behalves in various ways. I did not know who might return my email, and was thrilled to

find a response email from AFSC activist and organizer, Five Mualimm-ak. It came the very next day.

*September 10, 2013.* I felt immediately welcomed with offers to visit the New York office and as Five cc'd additional email recipients associated with the AFSC. The instant gratification at the success of my reaching out made me determined to learn as much as possible about solitary confinement and its impact from Five and his colleagues. Five wrote, "our door is always open," and I had a sense, right from our first exchange, that I would learn a great deal. Here was a man who had experienced the impact of solitary confinement and who made it his mission to do something about it, starting with his home state of New York, incidentally with some of the highest rates of solitary confinement across the United States.

Five Mualimm-ak was working in real-estate foreclosure, renovation, and renting of properties in New York when he was involved in a situation with police involving illegal activity on both sides. He was robbed of significant money but also pleaded to several charges. These included charges for criminal weapon possession in the fourth degree, money laundering, and tax evasion (Bartlett 2013). Some of these charges were dropped and he was released, yet others were reissued in the case and Five was ultimately sent to prison. He was incarcerated at Riker's Island prison, operated by the New York Department of Corrections and home to a capacity of 14,000 inmates (InsideOut PTV 2013). Shortly after his incarceration, a fight broke out, and Five was sent to solitary confinement, despite being stabbed at the scene. All five individuals involved were sent into isolation, what he describes as "the box" (Bartlett 2013). Five spent five years in solitary confinement of the eleven years he spent in the prison system. This amounted to

five years and 2,054 days alone. (Mualimm-ak 2013) That is over 47,000 hours in isolation (InsideOut PTV 2013).

I had the opportunity to correspond over email with Five from September 10, 2013 through October 11, 2013. His testimony was the first I had personally heard from someone who was placed in solitary confinement, and that enabled me a more tangible understanding of how such circumstances could impact an individual. I wrote to Five in my initial response email, “I am curious to hear you elaborate more on what sorts of therapy you would advocate for correction purposes and your personal experience with solitary confinement ties exactly into the topic of my project” (Schnitman, email to Five Mualimm-ak, September 11, 2013). To this, Five responded with an email that shed light on the psychological implications of long-term isolation, in other words stints in solitude exceeding fifteen days. Five stated that individuals could experience “depression, despair, anxiety, rage, claustrophobia, hallucinations, problems with impulse control, and an impaired ability to think, concentrate, or remember” (email to author, September 11, 2013). It was clear from Five that people can experience a wide array of emotional responses to the lack of social stimuli and sensory deprivation accompanying such small spaces as constantly lit, six by nine foot cells.

Five elaborates in interviews he has done since his release in 2012 about his experiences with losing track of time and running out of ways to spend his time. He stated in an interview for the video, “One Man’s Story”:

You end up talking to yourself because you want to hear the sound of a voice subconsciously. Once you finish counting all the screws in the cell, how many bolts in the wall, how many cracks in the ceiling, the wave the stroke of the paintbrush that painted the wall. And then what else is there to do? [15 Days, prod.]

Five would use his memories to fuel his time and tapped into his artistic side in order to maintain opportunities to look at human faces. He described how he took up portrait drawing, which had enabled him the opportunity to make some money while in general population. During his incarceration at Auburn Prison in New York, he was sent to solitary for receiving a ticket for having too many pencils in his cell. He described in “One Man’s Story” how the number of allotted pencils was set at seven, and prison officials viewed any additional pencils as potential weaponry (15 Days).

In another interview for an “Inside Out” segment aired on the British Sky Network, Five discussed the range of non-violent infractions that can lead to someone getting sent to isolation. These included having too many books or media sources, too many t-shirts, too many packs of sugar, talking back to a guard, or looking at a guard the wrong way (InsideOut PTV 2013). In corroborating with the facts given by Scott Paltrowitz of the Correctional Association of New York, who stated in the same segment, that five of six individuals in New York are sentenced to isolation for non-violent offenses, Five stated that there is a misconception that prisoners in solitary are the worst of the worst when in reality the system bears that label (InsideOut PTV 2013).

I asked Five if he could elaborate on the sorts of therapy he would advocate for correction purposes, and learned a great deal about his present projects. I had learned from Five’s first email to me that he has worked in New York, within New York City jails, and with a number of existing activist organizations. He had mentioned his involvement in the newly formed New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (NYCAIC) that seeks to foster increasing protest against what it describes as the no touch torture of prison isolation practice. No touch torture refers to practices



that are psychologically rather than physically damaging. He described this particular organization, spearheaded by AFSC activist, Bonnie Kerness, as “the largest united organizational force against solitary confinement ever” (Mualimm-ak, email to author, September 10, 2013). I learned Five was also approached after his release by the Campaign to End the New Jim Cro, a project run by the Riverside Church Prison Ministry that has been inspired by Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Cro: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (InsideOut PTV 2013). He has founded and directs the Incarcerated Nation Campaign to help released inmates transition back to life on the outside (Foley 2014). The campaign maintains a regular online email newsletter, twitter, and updated list of relevant articles and media links (Incarcerated Nation Campaign).

In addition to active work with these organizations and projects, Five regularly attends Board of Corrections meetings and assemblies with political figures. He describes his nature:

I have always been a fighter since I was on the inside (incarcerated). That’s where most of my problems came because I was an organizer. I started organizations, community groups, and teaching. I believe that the education in prison system was limited so I try to teach other courses inside of there...The campaign to end the New Jim Cro, I felt really was the solution. [InsideOut PTV 2013]

Such a statement accompanies his belief in the power of educating others, piquing interest in conditions of prison isolation, and supporting those existing organizations that are active on issues relating to prison reform. Offers for me “to come out and be educated” about solitary confinement were apparent from his very first response and throughout our conversations (Mualimm-ak, email to author, September 19, 2013). I was sent several lengthy and heavily descriptive emails about which I was elated. Five is

someone who takes the time to engage others and provoke them to think in new ways, yet his responses are also a reflection of the psychological scars left by prolonged isolation.

*September 12, 2013.* Five had sent me a long email about the self-propelled projects in which he is involved relating to former inmates re-entering society. Five had been describing how he supports the non-profit groups that are spearheading measures to help recently released inmates acclimate to living outside prison walls. He shared how he wished that prisons contained more programming to help with re-entry but acknowledged that this would entail admitting that prison policies inflict psychological impairment. He summed up the sensation of returning to communities. He stated, “its almost like being blind folded for years then having it ripped off and you have to deal with the sensation of your senses being suddenly returned to you” (Mualimm-ak, email to author, September 11, 2013). Between a prison system that Five describes as “deliberate” and “illogical” and those officials operating within it who place blame on prisoner faults for recidivism, he feels that key issues are not being addressed when it comes to re-entry. He wrote me:

how can a person reintegrate with out feeding him/herself , where would they live, all of this takes funds so employment is the first major issue. housing? how is the community in which this person is returning to making a way for him to reside there, and do keep in mind that no matter how long this person has been away ny state law states that they have to return to their county of conviction. [Mualimm-ak, email to author, September 11, 2013]

It became clear that there are many factors and state mandated stipulations involved in re-entry, but it was also insightful for me to see how some of the “mental damage from a long period of sensory deprivation” has manifested for Five.

Five told me that he will sometimes drift off when writing. He has described additional experienced symptoms in other interviews and posts. In one post on *the guardian*, Five described his challenges in the year following his release:

I know that I have irreparable memory damage. I can hardly sleep. I have a short temper. I do not like people to touch me. I cannot listen to music or watch television or sports. I am only beginning to recover my ability to talk on the phone. I no longer feel connected to people. [Mualimm-ak 2013]

While the mental cost of prolonged solitary confinement has taken a toll on Five, he is passionate about raising awareness among policy makers and everyday people.

I had gone through the process of getting Connecticut College approval from appropriate governing bodies to construct a to-scale model administrative segregation cell on campus. I had shared these ideas with Five, and found out that he was also in the process of in his words, “creating a project that includes a cell and a photo exhibit around solitary confinement” (email to author, October 19, 2013). Five offered to help me with my project, and I was grateful for the advice he was willing to communicate. A selection of his artwork is exhibited currently at Saint Lawrence University’s Richard F. Brush Gallery in the “Cellblock Visions” exhibit, curated by Phyllis Kornfeld (Foley 2013).

Among his work with activist organizations, on policy in his home state and nationwide, and using art as a means of spreading awareness about the faces behind solitary, Five is intent on sending a message, stated clearly in his InsideOut PTV interview. In his words, “America is financially addicted and hopelessly obsessed with caging bodies and arresting their citizens [...] we have a dependency on prisons” (InsideOut PTV 2013). When people leave prison, state laws mandate, in New York, their release directly to the communities in which they were convicted. Five gave me a scenario in which a given John is released from prison.

john<sup>5</sup> now has to not only cope with the psychological effects of sensory deprivation & social skills deprivation, but he has to navigate through , stop n frisk , guard towers in the community, and that ever present felony tag that will get him denied every possible position. [email to author, September 12, 2013]

Five maintains that positive re-entry at this time is not widely possible when outside communities become prisons of a new genre for recently released inmates. He said, “this is why i work on behalf of afsc to create support for those returning home because there was no one doing this in new york” (Mualimm-ak, email to author, September 12, 2014). He is determined to do something about the hoops through which former inmates must jump.

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<sup>5</sup> Lowercase letters were used to pay respect to Five’s typography. As a result of his isolation experience, he noted that he tends to run on when typing, which results in the lack of uppercase letters.

# Raphael Sperry

Architect, Professor, Activist

Figure 7  
Petitioning AIA

Petitioning American Institute of Architects (AIA)  
"American Institute of Architects (AIA): Prohibit the design of  
spaces for killing, torture, and cruel, inhuman, or degrading  
treatment"

To:  
American Institute of Architects (AIA)  
Prohibit the design of spaces for torture or killing in the Ethics  
Code.

As people of conscience, we believe that architects should not  
participate in the design of spaces that violate human life and  
dignity. The profession of architecture is dedicated to improving  
the built environment and protecting the health, safety, and  
welfare of all people. Participating in or allowing the  
development of buildings designed for torture and killing,  
torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is fundamentally  
incompatible with professional practice that respects standards of  
decency and human rights. We urge AIA to amend the Code of Ethics  
and Professional Conduct to prohibit the design of spaces intended  
for execution or for torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading  
treatment or punishment, including prolonged solitary confinement.  
Sincerely,  
[Your name]

*Note:* Petition put forth by Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility in 2012. The petition is currently active.

The above text is the content of a highly innovative petition coming out of the architectural realm that is gaining momentum and turning heads. It is the brainchild of the non-profit organization, ADPSR, based in San Francisco, California. Signatures have come from all across the United States and from supporters around the world. The greatest numbers of signatures have originated in California and New York. The petition, created on Change.org, has gained significant national media attention, and has been active for over a year. It has garnered 1,340 signatures. Only one hundred and sixty more signatures are needed to reach the ADPSR's goal of 2,000 before submission to the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The man behind the campaign's push to abolish the construction of prisons that utilize the death penalty and house prisoners in solitary confinement is an innovator acting to oppose contemporary profit-seeking prison privatization efforts. His name is Raphael Sperry.

*December 26, 2013.* After following a lead from a 2005 article sent to me by Bonnie Kerness on the work of the architect/social activist, Raphael Sperry, in San Francisco, I knew I had to find out more about efforts surrounding solitary confinement within the architectural field. Some of the men and women that design and build these large-scale prisons are making incredibly high figures for their work, but how many of them interested in prison reform or thinking about human rights? I began to find my answers as I perused the ADPSR website, coming across the AIA petition, and the "Contact Us" page. I figured since I had great luck with the AFSC; why not see whose eyes reach my inquiries with ADPSR. I summarily submitted a brief description of my queries into prison design for solitary confinement cells, the ADPSR's mission and

goals for the betterment of prison design, as well as requests for correspondence, either verbal or written. The results of reaching out once again far exceeded my expectations.

*December 27, 2013.* One simple line brought the exciting promise of collaboration. Raphael Sperry had typed, “Dear Sarah, I will be happy to speak with you after the holidays. Please get in touch after Jan 6. Raphael Sperry” (email to author, December 17, 2013). It also gave me a window into the field of architecture in which I had previously uncovered little relating to activism efforts. After coordinating time differences and scheduling, we had set up our phone call, and I approached Raphael with the questions I had prepared.

*January 10, 2014.* Raphael is a very easy person to talk to. With a general ease to his demeanor and openness to answering questions that dig at the roots of interest and involvement, the polished skills of an educator jump right out- even over the phone. When asked, “When were you first exposed to the issues the ADPSR tackles in its petition like solitary confinement and execution chamber? Was it through your architectural background or in another context?,” Raphael described how the interest grew as a product of the Iraq war. The issues taken with prisons became apparent in speaking with activists about the war. Raphael explained that peace activists, in the United States, reference the similarities between the war at home and the wars waged abroad in which the treatment of prisoners is a key component of both. It was through such exposure, that Raphael came to find a passion for working on the prison segregation boycott, yet his interest in activism also came by way of sustainable architecture.

Raphael succeeded as a scholar himself, attending Harvard University for his undergraduate work and Yale University School of Architecture for his Masters degree, which he completed in 1999 (Open Society Foundation 2014). His initial interests lay in the field of green architecture, and in 1999 he moved out to the West Coast. In California, Raphael found success in volunteer work with the Green Resource Center, operated by the Northern Californian chapter of the AIA. The Center provided an opportunity to continue work in green building initiatives while in between jobs. Raphael worked as a Consultant with the San Francisco-based architecture firm, Simon & Associates, Green Building Consultants. He is licensed as an architect, certified by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) (California College of the Arts 2014). He has worked on a number of building projects seeking to attain such certification at the Gold and Platinum levels (American Institute of Architects). While working in San Francisco during 2003 and 2004, Raphael contributed greatly to the city's efforts to improve the sustainability of its buildings through his role on the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association's (SPUR) sustainable development committee and as a public adviser for the city's green building task force (AIA 2013).

In addition to his work in consulting and advising, Raphael was active in sustainable building for private, commercial, and institutional endeavors including the first official rainwater catchment system on a private residence, the biggest straw-bale structure found in the United States, as well as projects at University of California, Berkeley and San Francisco International Airport (ADPSR "American Institute of Architects" 2014). Raphael is also an accomplished educator, having taught courses in Stanford University's Architectural Design program within the Green Architecture Studio



and at California College of the Arts as an adjunct professor (Open Society Foundation 2014). His past courses have examined energy and water conservation initiatives within buildings, and he speaks at a variety of public engagements regarding his knowledge of green architecture.

However, Raphael was looking to experiment with new architectural fields of study, and the opportunity came when he was invited to join the board of the ADPSR. In conjunction with his work at ADPSR, Raphael became very interested in dealing with social violence and policy particularly as they relate to the architecture field. He explained to me in our phone interview how his architecture school program has enabled little opportunity or time to engage in activism work, yet through ADPSR, he was able to learn about the use of solitary confinement and creation of such spaces. He came to understand the reliance of state and federal Departments of Corrections on architects to construct spaces in which segregation is approved. In 2011, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Méndez, stated that his reasoning for urging the abolition of solitary confinement lay in the physical and psychological torturous nature of the practice. Raphael was greatly impacted by Méndez's report, and it was through it, they he came to understand discrepancies in the AIA Code of Ethics. He profoundly believes that the AIA, with regards to solitary confinement, does not force architects to uphold human rights, and has chosen to advocate for policy changes through ADPSR.

Raphael Sperry has been working on issues related to prison reform through changing prison designs for the past ten years. Unlike most activists who get involved in organizing efforts during their early twenties, Raphael became involved in his early thirties. Despite his age and having small children, which meant he was unable to work at

the high levels of engagement to which he was accustomed, Raphael continued to pursue means of engaging architects about the realities of the facilities they were constructing. In recent years, Raphael has been integral in the launching of the Alternatives to Incarceration / Prison Design Boycott Campaign as its founder and director. Both the campaign and the AIA petition are intended to promote awareness among architects about their obligation to contribute to the construction of a built environment that is both socially just and sustainably minded. It is also intended to reach communities impacted by the prisons within them and make an impression on the public to support current efforts for the abolition of prison isolation coming out of other fields like psychology and human rights.

When asked about the nature of the proposed ban in terms of the sorts of changes it will have in years to come on prisons, Raphael shed important light what he has come to understand about the nature of the American prison system. He described how individual cases over isolation units and conditions are difficult to make in the United States courts systems due to the lack of adherence to jurisdiction made in international law. Raphael explained how there are a few important U.S. based cases that set a precedent for rulings over solitary confinement, yet the U.S. court system chooses to deem isolation conditions to be “cruel and unusual” as opposed to international law, which considers these cases to be “cruel and degrading.” The Alternatives to Incarceration / Prison Design Boycott Campaign and the petition to the AIA both actively work to change the language of the AIA Code of Ethics to necessitate an “evolving form of decency” made in prison facilities. Raphael supports the fact that prisons with isolation units and death penalty

practices do not exhibit this progressing decency, which is vaguely outlined in the Code of Ethics as it currently stands (ADPSR “Ending Design for Torture and Killing” 2013).

The AIA Code states, “Members should uphold human rights in all their professional endeavors,” yet Raphael argues that direct reference to existing international human rights standards is vital to enforce the AIA’s Code. The Code, more broadly speaking, is not targeted enough to prohibit all human rights violations, according to Raphael and the ADPSR. Raphael was clear on his position that many architects understand why the death penalty is considered to be a highly contested case of human rights. Yet, he argues that less see the range of negative outcomes associated with solitary confinement and the prisons that house inmates in such conditions, particularly supermax facilities.

I asked Raphael to elaborate on his visits to correctional facilities, and asked him what stood out on these. He explained that he has visited prisons from county jails all the way up the security levels to supermax, and noticed that even the smallest facilities had isolation cells. In most cases, he was unable to gain access to prisoners beyond visiting areas and was rarely allowed a tour of the prison outside of these areas. However, the cleanliness of the facilities he visited, the apparent orderly management, and pride in the professional nature of the prison design on the part of prison administrators struck him. In his visiting experience, he has come to believe that Corrections personnel share only what they want visitors to hear without always treating inmates with the same level of respect. This discrepancy is part of the psychological harm isolation can inflict when the only form of contact with human stimuli afforded to a person for a prolonged period of time is highly negative and removed.

Raphael and the ADPSR receive letters, photographs, drawings, and evidence from legal proceedings in the mail from current and former inmates, inmates' families, and campaign supporters. These media forms and textual evidence lay a great deal of the groundwork for the knowledge base ADPSR has built to inform and complement their activism efforts. Raphael described the correspondence and meetings he has had with the prisoner whose artwork now appears on the website of ADPSR. This connection helped Raphael to better understand how solitary confinement can be experienced.

It is through the connections with those on the inside and with those on the outside, including other architects of low to high security prisons, activists, and advocates, that important transparency is given to the physical and psychological issues of prison isolation. When discussing the spread of supermax facilities around the United States, Raphael referenced his academic collaborations with Professor Keramet Reiter, who is Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law and Society, and Law at University of California, Irvine. ADPSR is currently in the process of using Professor Reiter's extensive compiled list of supermax facilities to map the location of all of prisons of this nature. Raphael is also connected with Bonnie Kerness of the AFSC, as both have been looking into collaborating on joint book selling efforts and promotion of the AIA petition, described to me by Bonnie (Kerness, email to Raphael Sperry, February 13, 2014-February 14, 2014).

In 2012, Raphael had the opportunity to connect on issues of criminal justice with scholars from a variety of fields. He became the recipient of a prestigious Soros Justice Fellowship awarded by the Open Society Foundations. The University of California, Berkeley College of Environmental Design and the Berkeley Law School cooperatively

host the fellowship program for advocacy and media interests (Open Society Foundation 2014). The new selection of fellows takes places on an annual basis (AIA 2013). Raphael became the first architect to receive the achievement for criminal justice reform.

At the conference for current and former fellows in 2012, he spent significant time talking with other fellows, whose backgrounds were mostly in law, about how they all got into the field of criminal justice. They spent time sharing their thoughts and opinions about each other's work. They bounced ideas off one another regarding social, political, and racial privileges to ignore the myriad of issues plaguing the nation's prisons and policy towards them. Raphael referenced a conversation with one fellow who was working on immigration law and policies at the time. She was saying all the fellows are invested in their work and in criminal justice reform "because it seems compelling and because it's the right thing to do," according to Sperry (personal interview, January 10, 2014). Some of the fellows are invested in criminal justice for more personal or more intellectual reasons. Raphael's personal involvement came out of the anti war movement, but he explained that everyone has different motivations, paths to activism, and experiences personal impact. He explained to me that he attempts to work at a level of activity that will not burn him out (Sperry, personal interview, January 10, 2014).

After his success with working on issues of social justice through the architectural community, interested academic circles, and prisoners and their families, Raphael has important advice to impart on those who are trying to raise awareness about the issues of prison isolation in places where there is little discussion on the topic. He explained to me that the best route would be to get a group involved, which can be a small core of three to five passionate individuals. At an accredited academic institution, these individuals may

be students, faculty, staff, and community members who can collectively strategize organizing efforts and awareness raising campaigns such as to-scale cell construction and film screenings. He stated, if people can be enabled to admire the efforts, they will begin to make an impact. Raphael recommended starting a pen pal program with prisoners at nearby prison facilities to gauge a better sense of the range of prisoner experiences. He emphasized a need to make sure the voices of those most definitely impacted are included in discussions, as well as those of families and community members.

Part of Raphael's story is his work with the public and those invested in the architecture industry as an educator about the impacts of prison isolation. He has plans to put together a class on architecture and human rights in a seminar style format to be held at one of the universities where he formerly worked as an adjunct professor. He also hopes to reach a wider range of architects, themselves, by getting at the roots of their duties within the field to create a more enriching built environment. Raphael explained the essence of such thinking, which has continued to spur his work with ADPSR over the last ten years, "My feeling was I want to work on this movement but do something specific to what we [as architects] do, to professional identity, lay claim to what our responsibilities are and tackle them. There is value in getting more focused" (personal interview, January 10, 2014). That focus on the design of spaces, which pose violations to human rights, is crucial to Raphael's future goals for the AIA petition and the overall approach by the AIA to prison construction.

Raphael demands the responsibility owed by architects as they design prisons and more broadly any building in which the rights of human beings must be protected. He was clear: It's not that he *wants to* but rather he is *going to* get the AIA Code of Ethics

changed to specify opposition to the construction of solitary confinement cells and additional “designs of spaces for killing, torture, and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment” (ADPSR “Ending Design” 2013). He plans to go to any lengths necessary to continue to advocate on behalf of prisoners and their families by speaking with additional AIA chapters about the petition and campaign. He is willing to critique the AIA for their lack of identification with international opposition to solitary confinement. In words, which seem to wrap his basic philosophy and motivations all in one, by connecting the goals of architects all over the nation, Raphael stated: “What’s the point of saving the planet if we’re abusing the people on it? Restorative buildings are more efficient. What other buildings shouldn’t be built?” (personal interview, January 10, 2014). His innovative way of thinking demonstrates a powerful means of melding spheres of interest for active change.

## **Dr. Keramet Reiter**

**Professor of Criminology, Law & Society, & Law**

*“Both the long terms prisoners spend in solitary confinement in the United States and the large number of prisoners being held under these conditions deserve further scrutiny and oversight. Are these conditions constitutional, effective, or necessary? The answer to this question is, at the very best, that we do not know.*

*In sum, I applaud the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights for hosting a hearing on solitary confinement in U.S. prisons. The use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons is largely invisible, unchecked, and brutal. Congressional attention raises visibility, and will facilitate efforts to decrease the prevalence of civil and human rights violations in U.S. prisons.”*

Reiter 2012:6

Prisons implicate so many disciplines. Topics relating to reform invite many legal questions about how we, as human beings, build space and structure our relations within such spaces. These broad themes are among those expressed to me in my January 23, 2014 phone interview with Professor Keramet Reiter, J.D., Ph.D. and those that underlie much of Professor Reiter’s work in criminology and law. After ten years of research and writing on the history and use of solitary confinement, Keramet has become an expert in her fields of study. This is her story.

Without any prior knowledge of the issues surrounding prisons, Keramet found herself personally engaged with them from a young age. As a freshman in college, Keramet began volunteering her time at a prison teacher in an established tutoring program that catered to GED preparation. The experience became a powerful jumpstart to



getting involved in prison advocacy. She explained to me in our interview how she was often surprised by the normalcy of the inmates with whom she worked, as prisoners are often “othered,” or viewed in a different light based on their criminal records. Keramet continued her personal work with inmates at various institutions including the co-ed Suffolk jail, a juvenile detention center, and many prisons of varying security degrees. She taught English at Riker’s Island in New York, worked in several Massachusetts based supermax facilities, and also became involved with the American Friends Service Committee’s Boston based branch while living on the east coast. It was through AFSC that Keramet developed a practical advocacy perspective and more of an activism angle over time. She found that there is a close tie between research and policy outcomes, which has fueled her work in criminal justice, specifically on prison reform (Reiter, personal interview, January 23, 2014).

Keramet received a Master of Arts from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York before moving out to California to pursue her interests (UC Irvine 2014). She started with the Prison Law Office: Protecting the Constitutional Rights of California Prisoners through Class Action, Litigation, Legal Services, and Advocacy, and has also worked with Human Rights Watch, an independent organization. Through both experiences, Keramet studied the legal dimension and nature of policies and litigation concerning prison isolation. Her work as a lawyer has brought her within the walls of California supermax facilities like Pelican Bay and California State Prison, Corcoran, giving her further insight into the inner workings of the criminal justice system as it operates for individual inmates’ cases. Although Keramet’s work has come to focus largely on issues within California where there is a long-standing litigation

history for issues of prison isolation, she explained to me how the corrections system has itself evolved a great deal both in California, in states across the nation, and at the federal level. New issues have emerged to replace others necessitating different approaches.

Keramet profoundly believes that change in the form of judicial action on behalf of inmates has to take a multifaceted approach between legislation, litigation, and raising public awareness in the courts to give better oversight to the public with regards to the humane treatment of prisoners. American courts deem the conditions of solitary confinement to be constitutional which does not resemble the same policy as has been stated internationally. Keramet pointed out how some of the complaints about conditions in supermax facilities, such as overcrowding or dirty conditions, no longer stand in many prisons. She stated there are always new challenges in prisons and feels that there are trends of cynicism with regards to the possibilities of changing a long-standing practice with such deeply entrenched economic and political roots. However, she believes that progress is slowly being made.

Keramet gave several examples of cases that are garnering significant attention in the media, which are raising awareness about a need to place limits on isolation stays. One California case regards a male inmate who has been housed in isolation for over forty years, a time frame that some argue is outside of moral boundaries. The case, which appears to be moving forwards towards the man's release from isolation, has prompted members of academic circles, social justice and human rights advocates, and members of the public to examine other cases where time served in isolation exceeds ten years. Keramet argues that is through the research into broader questions regarding what sorts

of conditions are necessary in what instances for which inmates, that policies must be restructured and re-approached (personal interview, January 23, 2014).

In her years obtaining both her J.D. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of California, Berkeley and working in broadening educational programs at facilities like San Quentin State Prison, Keramet has come to realize that there have been cycles of enhanced public attention given to prisons. In the 1970s, there was significant accessibility to prison issues while the 1980s and 1990s saw attention to prisons further expand. She has seen the dialogue about prison systems change among the public over time. She argues that people more readily know the term “supermax” and are more aware of the range of symptoms inmates may exhibit as a result of their isolation. However, certain facets of prison life readily surprise even the most well researched individual, including Keramet herself.

I asked Keramet what was most challenging for her in engaging with these weighty human rights issues and a legal system that has little role in the outcome of most inmates’ cases as compared with the specific administrations operating in prisons. Keramet replied that since she has done so much work in various prisons, there is not too much that surprises her. Yet, she has talked to many people who were incarcerated and subsequently released. Keramet explained how she is constantly surprised by the resilience of such people in battling psychological impacts, ranging from hallucinations to symptoms of PTSD. She talked with people who participated in the periods of hunger strikes at Pelican Bay and was very impressed by how rationally these individuals strategized considering their circumstances. She was clear to state that not all of those individuals who are confined in isolation embody what can be deemed the worst of the

worst. Yet, she also describes the importance of understanding how decisions are made to place an individual in conditions of isolation.

When I asked Keramet what stood out to her most on her visits to prison facilities where some or all inmates are housed in isolation, she described how her research has led her to interview correctional officers for an alternative perspective that is not regularly shared. She explained that many corrections officers understand the human rights cases made on behalf of inmates and stated that officers want to share their stories of day-to-day work and experiences. Keramet described how, in her experience, officers were often happy to justify their jobs and the work they do in relaying the many challenges and struggles to running the prisons, including dealing with gangs and violent inmates. She described how it is easy to generalize tiers of authority into a singular perspective and assume all prison staff are responsible for mistreatment or the conditions of isolation, but she maintains that the situation is not so black and white, but rather there are significant structural flaws in the fabric of the criminal justice system as it deals with policy on prison isolation. Keramet stated that difficult questions ought to be asked about whether correctional facilities make more challenges and create more tensions than manage these facilities. How do prison officials keep the most violent inmates away? These are the sorts of questions that Keramet has explored in her research, published works, and with her students in the courses she teaches.

Keramet is a scholar who has published a number of papers relating to supermax prisons and is finalizing a book on the history of solitary confinement with a focus on California as well, yet she also enjoys serving an educational role for university students. Keramet teaches at the University of California, Irvine where she is Professor of

Criminology, Law and Society, and Law. Her courses cover punishment and issues of prison reform. In order to engage her students, Keramet uses specific examples of individuals who have been kept in prolonged isolation, examples of unfair case studies, and has students debate regularly. She seeks for students to not just discuss right and wrong but to think systematically about issues like extreme costs, abusive conditions, and widespread policy. In a panel discussion for TakePart Live's August 8, 2013 episode, Keramet made an important point about range of issues at play when dealing with how United States invests its money. She stated. "Where we spend our money is a moral question. So whether we spend it on education or on prisons is both a financial question and a moral decision" (Participant Media 2013). These are the sorts of connections that Keramet hopes to help her students make as they analyze punishment systems based in the U.S.

Keramet also maintains that students know a good deal about the general situation of prisons in California. Stories about correctional facilities are often present in the news considering there are many situated on the West coast that gain significant attention such as Pelican Bay and California State Prison at Corcoran. She encourages her students to use their existing knowledge and supplement it with new case studies to approach important legal questions. Such questions approach how U.S. architects and governments co-construct spaces for punishment purposes. These questions range from whether every prisoner in isolation deserves to experience the same harsh cell layout and prison environment to whether inmates ought to be allowed to see grass and engage more regularly with living organisms. Her courses are structured to examine what policies

embody or rules inhibit basic rights, freedoms, and privileges, as well as what sort of treatment is deserved based on type of offense committed.

Keramet argues that many studies have been done which conclusively prove a tie between unconstitutional practices and mental health decline. In her 2012 statement before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, Keramet argued:

First, the harsh conditions in supermax prisons and the extreme discretionary control prison administrators have over supermax prisoners often open the door to unconstitutional abuses – clear violations of human rights – in these institutions... the harsh conditions in supermax prisons can cause severe mental health problems, or can exacerbate existing mental health problems. Indeed, prisoners are often sent to solitary confinement because they have mental health problems that preclude their adjustment to standard prison life. Once in solitary confinement, these problems often worsen. And prisoners who did not have pre-existing mental health problems often start to experience problems – from hallucinations, to suicidal ideation, to suicide itself – the longer they spend time in isolation. [Reiter 2012:3-4]

Given these findings, the wealth of studies that show solitary confinement is disproportionately experienced by people of minority racial identification, and the conclusions that housing inmates in solitary confinement is far more expensive than housing them in general population, Keramet seeks to prompt her students to think about alternatives to prison isolation (Jiang 2013:3).

When Keramet and I discussed these, she explained that there are not many great alternatives to isolation, but there are a great many adjustments and factors that ought to be taken into account and played with. Keramet is fearful that without the collective input of scholars, advocates, prisoners and their families, prison administrators will be left to design alternatives to isolation. She believes that a combination of tactics ought to be tested with an emphasis on removing the mentally ill from isolation situations, limiting

the time that inmates are spending in isolation, and towards amending how widespread the use of isolation is for prisoners that do not qualify among the worst of the worst. She maintains that it is important to account for the fact that there is a small but existing population of inmates that would be difficult to house in general population. These include gang leaders who are ordering hits from inside prison walls and inmates who commit violent acts towards others while housed in general population. In examining alternate forms of imprisonment, the most effective solutions will come by increased attention paid towards prison studies from a wide variety of fields.

Despite the potential difficulties of accessing inmates inside prisons for research opportunities, Keramet believes in bridging the gap between fields and utilizing connections between those people who have gotten inside to talk with prisoners and administrators. She believes that such connectivity is essential to coming up with new ways of thinking about effective reform measures for prison isolation. Keramet said to me that the community of advocates and interested public “has to stick together” and join together across state boundaries and perspectives (personal interview, January 23, 2014). She maintains that the community’s national nature gives it a unique opportunity to reach a wider audience to think about prisoner rights, human rights, and ways in which the legal system can more justly serve the needs of both at state and federal levels.

**Aseem Mehta**  
Student Documentary Director & Filmmaker

Figure 8  
*The Worst of the Worst*



*Note:* Digital Graphic produced by the Yale Visual Law Project for the 2012 documentary, *The Worst of the Worst*.

*According to the June 2012 Department of Correction Newsletter, two of Northern's six housing units have been closed due to budgetary concerns. Two more are expected to close by the spring of 2013. The same newsletter quotes Deputy Commissioner James Dzurenda: "Northern will never close or merge with another facility. We need Northern."*

Yale Visual Law Project 2012



Visual imagery is incredibly powerful as a means of connecting with people about a range of issues. As Australian-American actor and folk singer, Theodore Bikel once said that in displaying "...brutality as well as endurance and nobility, documentaries inform, prod our memories, even stir us to action. Such films do battle for our very soul" (Galender & Associates 2012). Bikel's words echo the sort of mentality maintained by the members of the Yale Visual Law Project at Yale Law School, who created the 2012 critically acclaimed documentary, *The Worst of the Worst: Portrait of A Supermax Prison*. The documentary was selected for the 2013 Utopia Film Festival, the 2013 United Nations Association Film Festival (UNAFF), and the 2013 Global Peace Film Festival (Cox "The Worst of the Worst" 2012). A talented and dedicated crew put the film together with a specific mission "to make pressing legal issues accessible to a larger public through the medium of film," according to Aseem Mehta (email to author, February 4, 2014). Yale University Senior, Aseem Mehta became a part of the Project's team, and has enjoyed working on the directing, writing, editing, fundraising, and interviewing necessary to craft the documentary. He shares the role of Director, Producer, and Writer with seven colleagues, including Jane Cooper, Valarie Kaur, Ally Lamb, Eric Parrie, Sharat Raju, and Ivy Wang. For Aseem, who described the "jaw dropping" sensation produced by learning that forty-five states have supermax prisons, the experience of being a part of this film has sparked an effort to uncover a deeper understanding of prisons as ingrained institutions within the fabric of U.S. society.

Aseem was a sophomore at Yale, studying ethics, economics, and politics, when the documentary was released, having participated in the making of several smaller-scale independent film projects prior to the release of *The Worst of the Worst*. Aseem has

undertaken research into the connections between public health, international law, and human rights, having studied both abroad in Cairo, Egypt and Paris, France, and concentrated on certain areas of the United States over the summers. His involvements have enabled him to research HIV interference tactics and clinic operations in African-American communities in Boston, support development for growing the amount of addiction recovery services in Minneapolis, and issues of prison reform in New York (Cox “Aseem Mehta” 2012). The ties that bind all of these projects, although manifested in different contexts, have served to direct Aseem not only into issues of advocacy and activism, but also have fueled his drive to explore them through the visual arts.

In an experience that Aseem describes as the “most immersive” and “in-depth” of his undertakings with filmmaking, the documentary’s crew spent a total of fifteen months to make the documentary on life inside a supermax facility, specifically inside the walls of Northern Correctional Institution. The prison, which has been operating since the mid-1990s, is located in Somers, Connecticut, just forty-five minutes from Yale’s campus in New Haven, Connecticut. The team learned of the supermax facility from students at Yale Law School, and during the course of production, the team was led on “two months of pre-production [pre-interviews, research, pre-scripting], about five months of production [filming], and eight months in post-production, [script-writing, editing, animation, color correction, sound mixing]” according to Mehta (email to author, February 4, 2014).

The crew spent significant time gaining a variety of perspectives and building up the narratives they sought to share from the stories of inmates, ex-inmates, corrections officers, policy makers and officials who are responsible for managing the prison, the

architect who designed the prison with its hard design features, the family members and friends who are profoundly impacted by the isolation of their loved ones, and the lawyers who advocate on behalf of such inmates. In total, the team collected nearly seventy hours of footage, both visual and auditory, which they were required to narrow down into a thirty-minute film. Aseem describe how he and his colleagues “were constantly thinking about how to tread the line of being true to our interviewees” while concurrently creating a final product that would be greater than their experience with Northern (email to author, February 4, 2014). It was through bringing these voices out of the prison and into the public, that Aseem and his colleagues were able to uncover why there are so many supermax prisons in operation across the United States.

Aseem described to me, in our written communication, how the inclusion of these varied voices was essential to building the documentary in a manner that would reach the broadest audience and come at the issue of solitary confinement from all perspectives. He explained that, “so many compelling and important social topics are shrouded in jargon, technical policy or administrative barriers that they never enter the public consciousness and remain confined to courtrooms, law review articles or government agencies” (email to author, February 4, 2014). The growth of supermax prisons and the widespread practice of solitary confinement figures among those issues, and for this reason, the importance of bringing the issues into the public realm of interest is all the more significant at a time in which the United States is widely using this practice.

Aseem described his team’s goal on this front. He stated:

In layering the voices upon one another, the film tries to make sense of supermax, to understand its role and intuit its effects. While we will leave the audience to make their own judgments, the full-circle approach to telling the story of Northern left us with the conclusion that the institution harms everyone who it touches, that

everyone from the guards to the inmates leave Northern damaged. [email to author, February 4, 2014]

This conclusion came after team had spent significant time with people directly impacted by Northern's isolation policies, an experience that was truly unprecedented at the institution. Aseem described how the Yale filmmakers were the first public group to receive a tour of Northern in its years of operations. He explained the difficulty of accessing the opportunity to first get inside prison walls, and second to speak with anyone either incarcerated within, working for, or involved in some way with the construction or management of Northern. The team was eventually granted permission to conduct interviews from Northern's Commissioner and administration, but only after the team had been able to demonstrate their goal of relaying a true narrative of Northern (email to author, February 4, 2014).

Although the film team was allowed inside prison walls, they were not allowed to shoot their own footage of what they encountered therein. The Department of Corrections, alternatively filmed, and then released this footage to Aseem and his co-directors for their use. Aseem described how the footage of the tiers of housing units and individual cells was "homemade, gritty, (and) shaky," yet it actually was far more informative of the character of Northern than what the team would have captured with their high definition equipment (email to author, February 4, 2014). Thus, the team chose to utilize the footage shot for them more prominently in the final documentary. Aseem and his co-directors were not granted access to those inmates in isolation for face-to-face interviews, yet they did have the chance to record their phone interviews and speak in person with inmates who had just been released from Northern, including former inmates,

Keishar and Darnell. Speaking with these individuals proved to be a very interesting prospect.

Ultimately every individual's story played a huge role in shaping the feel of the documentary for the producers and the audience they sought to reach. Aseem described how the inclusion of each interviewee's story was essentially making an active choice to relinquish and trust a part of the interviewee's life into the hands of strangers. Aseem described this as, "a huge responsibility to be given, and every single cut, every single edit, every word which we decided to include in the film and every word we chose to leave out, impacts how the personal narratives of each of these people becomes a public story" (email to author, February 4, 2014). This became for Aseem, one of the most rewarding, yet challenging aspects of the process, yet enabled him to better understand the perspectives of the various voices he and his team were representing.

Aseem described how many former inmates were conflicted as to whether they should be speaking with the members of the Yale Visual Law Project. The idea of re-opening the trauma of their lived experience coupled with a fear of stigmatization or assumption that such inmates had committed horrific crimes to land themselves in isolation made many hesitant to appear on camera. They feared being cast in a poor light by their employers, friends, and families for sharing their stories, yet those who ultimately chose to be were encouraged to form a bond of trust with the filmmakers. Aseem and his colleagues asked for input from these inmates, explained in detail how their testimony would appear, and conducted a number of conversations to get to know their interviewees. These interviews took an approach of consulting their interviewees as experts on solitary confinement rather than as informants.

The interviews also shed important light on the impact upon family members who have seen their mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and extended family members dealing with the trauma of prolonged isolation. While this is not the case with all inmates, for those who leave families behind to serve out their sentences, isolation really means the isolation of the entire family unit associated with the person. This is a fact that the Yale Visual Law Project well captured through *The Worst of the Worst*. Aseem and his colleagues followed the story of Rosalyn, the mother of a Northern inmate whose stint in solitary stemmed from conviction for an armed robbery. Rosalyn is quoted as follows:

It's actually all a blur to me with running to court and going to visit him whenever he was allowed a visit and trying to live my daily life. It's actually a blur. I couldn't even tell you, you know, how long he's been in Northern this time. It just seems like he's always been there. Visits in Northern are half an hour. It's behind a glass and you're on a telephone. If you're lucky you'll get a phone that actually works without the static [...] I wanted so badly for them (her children) to be different than the environment that we were growing up in. I didn't want them to be the typical ending up in jail, ending up getting into trouble and be something... They knew college wasn't an option, they both went to college. It's almost as if, like I failed. [Mehta et al, dir. 2012]

In her story, Rosalyn touches on the harsh realities as a parent from an area where incarceration is a regular route for many youth. Aseem described how these stories of social and economic injustices, disproportionate racial makeups of prison populations, and the nature of a criminal justice system that has a far wider impact than might be initially imagined are all important features of the conversation the film seeks to spark.

Additionally, the perspectives of those employed at Northern who are correctional officers or prison administrators are equally as important to share in painting the most total picture of the institution, and more broadly a picture of supermax facilities around the country. Aseem described a similar reluctance to participate in interviews on the part of these individuals in terms of offering insight into the psychological impact of their

jobs. Yet over time, relationships of trust were built, and several interviewees made the choice to share their experiences for inclusion in the documentary, despite an unsaid expectation of silence regarding personal emotional harm. Their words, according to Aseem, helped to open “up a space for others to begin talking about their experiences” (email to author, February 4, 2014). Some corrections officers expressed feeling unable to discuss the burden of their day-to-day work with friends or at home for fear of unduly passing it along. However, Aseem delved into detail about the nature of this burden in his conversation with me. He explained:

It was striking to see just how prevalent PTSD was among correctional officers and the extent to which that trauma has been internalized. For example, we heard from one our interviewees that he always sits with his back to the wall in restaurants so that no one can surprise him from behind. Still others told us about the deep depression, substance abuse and suicide attempts they witnessed or experienced firsthand. [email to author, February 4, 2014]

These heavy topics are explored in the film by several voices. One such individual, identified as Wayne, is a retired correctional officer who had worked at Northern. Wayne describes the ups and downs of his experiences, referencing the sorts of problems that officers that plagued the officers he worked with. He stated:

A lot of good memories here, a lot of great friends, a lot of nice people I met and a lot of crazy experiences that’s for sure. But I did it and got out and it’s a good venture...I’ve seen staff members their whole personality change. They may abuse certain-alcohol or get caught up in a drug situation. Their family life changes, they withdraw. I know of several people who have committed suicide. [Mehta et al, dir. 2012]

Wayne’s testimony opens a window into a voice that is often left unexpressed when looking at the problems with the practice of solitary confinement. As Northern Correctional Officer, Pete, corroborated, there exist some “horrific crimes that the general public doesn’t really know the in’s and outs of” (Mehta et al, dir. 2012).

Aseem described how the experience of writing and producing *The Worst of the Worst* was challenging, surprising, and thought-provoking, yet it affirmed the team's obligation to ensuring that the documentary adequately captured the operations of the facility and life in the short and long-term therein. In seeking to connect with a wider audience on assessing the role of supermax prisons in communities around the nation, Aseem's own views of prisons evolved. He stated that his role in the film's production was:

one of the most unforgettable experiences of my life, and for me, it reinforced the takeaway of the film, which is that the institution as a physical space in itself has its own life and personality that is destructive and harmful. And the reason I say this because I entered the facility as a filmmaker already predisposed to sympathizing with the inmates who were inside. Yet upon entering this cold, concrete, sterile and barren hall, I was met with an endless path of steel doors each with a tiny plexiglass window through which 45 sets of eyes peered at me and banged on the doors to get my attention. And I felt scared. I felt uncomfortable. Despite the fact that just a few hours ago I spent an entire day with Darnell [a former Northern inmate], and felt at ease and really entranced by his positive energy, the space of Northern is in itself dehumanizing. [email to author, February 4, 2014]

The first-hand experience of what it's like to take someone's story and do justice to its complexity, honesty, and individuality while also highlighting it in a broader symbolic light was no easy task for Aseem. Neither was directly experiencing the feeling of being surrounded by such harsh and deliberate architecture. Aseem is very tuned into the sensations brought on by the design of certain spaces stated that walking through Northern, was best explained as having "all of my life sucked out from me" (email to author, February 4, 2014). Aseem and his team had hoped that the film would hit others in ways similar to what they, themselves, experienced. They were not disappointed on this front.



When asked, “What has the response been to the film when screened or shown?” Aseem explained that the majority of audience members’ responses have been fairly universally stunned. He explained that at the panel discussions, question and answer sessions, and screenings that have been conducted since the release of *The Worst of the Worst*, audience members have often been completely silent following the final scenes. Many who asked questions immediately voiced questions regarding what can be done to change the system of incarcerating people in solitary confinement for extended periods of time and creating prisons solely for the purpose of isolating all inmates. Aseem described how the overwhelmingly positive response to the documentary at film festivals, at universities and law schools domestically and abroad such as Stanford, Northeastern, New York University, and King’s College in London, at conferences on issues of prison reform and social justice at the University of Michigan and University of Winnipeg in Canada, and at screenings held for community members in cities all over the nation from New Orleans to Hartford, Boston and Seattle.

Aseem explained that the film has moved viewers and inspired them to seek ways in which they can make known their discontent with the continued practice of prison isolation. The Yale Visual Law Project has been thrilled to connect interested members of the public with additional resources and activist or advocacy organizations, as well as their associated campaigns for prison reform. These include the ACLU, AFSC, and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT). Through such connections, the community based around the abolition of solitary confinement continues to grow across state borders with the addition of more people coming from very different backgrounds and fields of interest and expertise. As further individuals join the cause, the overall

prison reform movement also grows, and knowledge sharing takes place at heightened levels. Aseem and his co-directors are in Aseem's words "most proud" of how their awareness-raising efforts have spurred action and conversation within state governing bodies.

*The Worst of the Worst* was shown at the Massachusetts State House at a hearing on solitary confinement, for guards and prison officials at Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, and California Department of Corrections, as well as inside prisons for inmates in New York and Connecticut. Aseem is convinced that lawmakers have the potential to effect the greatest changes at the state and federal level if spurred to action by passion and demonstrated interest from their constituents. In our written communication, he cited the reforms made in states like Maine where the governor, as a public and influential leader, is required to sign off on all requests to place inmates in solitary confinement. He cited Mississippi's Commissioner of its Department of Corrections who cut the population in solitary by greater than ninety percent upon realizing the exponentially higher cost to the state, opportunity to reduce prisoner violence and recidivism rates, and chance to place left over funds into rehabilitative programs.

States like Massachusetts have proposed bills to more regularly review the cases of inmates held in isolation and cap their stays there at six months time. He remarked, "As the conversation about solitary continues I can't help but believe that legislators will see the inherent inhumanity and illogic of the practice" (email to author, February 4, 2014). He hopes that further efforts will create added transparency to the cases of prisoners, de-legitimize prolonged solitary as a practice in the political sphere, and contribute to the expansion of reforms across the country. Aseem points out that these

steps are small-scale, yet they are fundamental for setting further precedents for wider change, and he is thrilled to a part of the process.

**Bonnie Kerness**  
Activist, Editor, and Revolutionary

*An elder of my generation George Jackson said, “There is no turning back from awareness. If I were to alter my step now I would always hate myself. I would grow old feeling that I had failed in my obligatory duty that is ours once we become aware*

Kerness “The use of Isolation in US Prisons” 2013

Figure 9  
Bonnie Kerness Speaks at “Behind Enemy Lines”



*Note:* Photograph of Bonnie Kerness giving a talk during “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art” on April 16, 2014. Photograph taken by the author.

*September 10, 2013.* She has been described as a “pioneer” who “did the groundwork and success that [the prison reform movement and associated organizations] are having now,” according to David Fathi, Director of the ACLU’s National Prison Project. She is credited with making “a huge contribution early on by bringing a human-rights vision to the effort [that] provided the intellectual framework that we could grasp onto,” according to California Physician and activist, Corey Weinstein (Tapley 2012:2). Jean Ross, a prisoner-rights attorney in Princeton, New Jersey, describes her as “smart”, “articulate”, someone who “writes very well” and “thinks very well”. Ross describes her as unafraid to “confront the most difficult problems” (Tapley 2012:6). If you told me I would have been in direct contact with one of the forefront experts on solitary confinement, I probably would have scoffed. But sure enough, an email from none other than Bonnie Kerness appeared in my inbox.

At that moment, my thinking and understanding of this thesis began to further evolve, and I saw the potential for firsthand connectivity with those figures most directly involved in prison isolation from a wider range of fields. The content of that email was short and sweet, but full of interest. It read: “Sarah, can you call me on my cell. That would be so much easier for me at \*\*\*-\*\*\*-\*\*\*\*. I’d love to help. Best. Bonnie” (email to author, September 10, 2013). The promise of collaboration in that simple “I’d love to help” was surprising to me. Perhaps I underestimated the way that public figures will expend some time of their busy schedules to converse with college students they have never met. Perhaps I had never really understood how activism is education, or how people can reciprocally connect and share something meaningful with one another.

Bonnie Kerness is Coordinator of the Prison Watch Project, run through the Quaker organization, the AFSC. She is based in Newark, New Jersey. She has been instrumental in authoring and editing a number of publications with the AFSC including “The Prison Inside the Prison: Control Units, Supermax Prisons, and Devices of Torture” with Rachael Kamel in 2003; “Survivors Manual: Surviving in Solitary” of which the fifth edition was released in 2012, and “Torture in United States Prisons: Evidence of Human Rights Violations” of which the second edition was released in 2011 (Tapley 2012:3). I have had the pleasure of conversing with Bonnie through email and over the phone over the past eight months where I came to learn more about her activity in the civil and human rights arena for the past forty-five years (Kerness “The use of Isolation” 2013).

Bonnie’s interest in activism came at an early age. As a child reared during the volatile years of the 1950s and 1960s in the Bronx and Queens, Bonnie was shocked by the graphic images on television of school aged African American children harmed for trying to attend school (Tapley 2012:2). The images of beatings, hosing down by police forces, and dogs sent to bite the children profoundly impacted her and fueled her interest in pursuing social justice activism (Kerness, “The use of Isolation” 2013). At the age of fourteen, she began volunteering in the Lower East Side, where she first encountered social activists whose passions lay in fighting racial inequalities through community organization and awareness raising (Tapley 2012:2). At the age of nineteen, Bonnie moved to Tennessee where she began to work with additional organizations to better understand race relations and how they are connected with politics. She cites for instance, how systemic change evolved with the racially charged years of the 1970s. The first

MCUs appeared in New Jersey prisons in 1975. At this time, there were high rates of incarceration among Black Panthers, deemed radical thinkers who believed in the profound oppression of African Americans. Such units and the prisons that harbored them became increasingly funded by federal sources, marrying concepts of beliefs, race relations, politics, and economics (King, prod. 2010).

Through groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Bonnie began to understand her privilege in American society as a white person. While working in the South, Bonnie had the opportunity to spend a year studying at the well known Highlander Research and Education Center, formerly known as the Highlander Folk School. This institution, with a strong curriculum in social justice issues and organizing skills, had been attended by famous figures of the civil rights movement, including Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King (Tapley 2012:2). Bonnie describes this period and what education led her to work within prisons as such:

I moved to Tennessee and began working with Highlander which was the place in the south where everyone was trained...my generation of activists often found themselves in United States prisons. It was a generation that saw people on college campuses- Jackson State, Kent State, being killed by the National Guard. We saw on television Black Panther Fred Hampton get shot when he was sleeping. It was a generation that was forced into a certain kind of political consciousness when we were very young. [Voices of Hope Productions]

After a period of ten years, Bonnie returned north and settled in New Jersey where she began work with the AFSC. Her initial projects involved her in housing (Tapley 2012:2), in which she came to realize how many families had lost immediate family members to prisons and how conditions in such prisons could be shocking.

*September 11, 2013.* In our first phone interview at 5:00 pm, Bonnie mentioned the further development of her political interests during the 1970s and 80s, as she worked

with the AFSC. I had asked her to describe a “bit more about [her] experience working with the Quakers and the lens they bring to this issue especially since the Quakers realized early on that leaving one to their own devices was not a viable or productive rehabilitative or correctional strategy” (personal interview, September 11, 2013). Bonnie described to me how the Quakers are “known for begging forgiveness and asking permission” (personal interview, September 11, 2013). This is a philosophy, which has greatly contributed to their three hundred year legacy of human rights action (Kerness “The use of Isolation” 2013). She has described how the Quakers “believed in silence as a form of restitution being with God, and they also acknowledged early on that it didn’t work. No touch torture didn’t work” (King, prod. 2010). It was the conditions of psychological torture on people of all genders, of minority racial identities, and various ages spurred Bonnie to action.

According to Bonnie, as a social activist and human rights advocate, she has also been as an ally of those voices who struggle to speak out themselves. She stated in an interview for Eyong and Beeston’s documentary, *Lives*, “I was able to give a voice to people who were voiceless and I was able to be a voice and that was internally a profoundly definite experience. I was empowered in a way that I had never been empowered before” (Eyong and Beeston 2010). It is also profound that Bonnie able to be so vocal in activism within prisons as these were not spaces in which female activists has access until relatively recently in history. According to Dr. Jennifer Manion, who studies gender relations in American prisons throughout history, women were not allowed to be active in the prison sphere in the United States as reformers until 1823. Although they were active on a variety of other issues including women’s rights and the abolition of



slavery, American female prison activists have not existed for a very long span of time (Manion 2014). The degree of activism spearheaded by women has grown exponentially since that time, as demonstrated by the efforts on the part of Bonnie Kerness.

The 1970s and 1980s were a time in which people were vocal about civil, gender based, and human rights, yet some had stopped their organizing efforts and community scale activism. According to Bonnie:

They were killing my generation and later imprisoning it. It wasn't until I met people in prison that I had someone to talk to through the mentorship and encouragement of some of the other political prisoners to educate myself about my white-skin privilege. I understood the bottom line place, how prisons stood economically and [how they] politically function in this society. [Eyong and Beeston 2010]

She described to me how she is clear on her beliefs regarding solitary confinement as torture, so that “no one can take issue with [her]” (Kerness, personal interview, September 11, 2013). The clarity with which Bonnie operates is a large part of how she has been able to be a voice for those who cannot speak out themselves from prison.

Bonnie is currently involved in a variety of initiatives relating to the abolition of solitary confinement. Bonnie describes her work with the Prison Watch Project of the AFSC as:

a reflector the testimonies of human rights violations beyond anyone's wildest understandings that come into me every single day. It's men, and women, and children of color and I have to be true to their voice. A big part of what I'm doing right now is asking white folks to reflect on their own racism, which is very hard for whites to do, particularly left wing whites if you grew up in this country with white skin. [Eyong and Beeston 2010]

Bonnie is steadfast in her beliefs that the system of criminal justice, based in the United States, heavily disadvantages people of minority races and low economic status. As an educator, she is motivated by a passion for presenting her findings from years of working

with people, gathering information, and networking around the nation so that others may entertain new ways of thinking.

When I asked Bonnie about the role that education plays in her work with prisoners in solitary confinement and in the wider prison reform movement in our second interview, she presented an entirely novel approach to the connection between race relations and the laws governing civil rights in America. Bonnie stated, “When you are taught the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment- it’s that they freed the slaves.” This is not true. If you really read the Amendment, it says that the slaves were freed EXCEPT for those who have been convicted.” We are not supposed to know that. It is not taught in schools” (personal interview, October 13, 2013). I’ll never forget what followed. In a passionate, yet serious tone, Bonnie pronounced, “You are teaching yourself real history” (personal interview, October 13, 2013).

Bonnie was referring to the content of the Amendment which reads, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States” (“The use of Isolation” 2013). She discusses how slavery has transformed to exist as a sort of neo-slavery within prisons. This occurs as young and older members of minority communities and poorer areas experience increased law enforcement within their neighborhoods, as youth are increasingly cycled into the prison system through school systems, and families that suffer for poor economic standing are broken up while those family members in prison are suddenly generating substantial income. Bonnie describes how such income is generated through the profits made on the privatization of operations, architecture, food service, and healthcare while taxpayer dollars cover costs (“The use of Isolation” 2013).

Bonnie's concerns additionally lie with other groups of people imprisoned perhaps with underlying racial inequities, but also for their political or religious beliefs.

Over her years working on the Prison Watch Project, Bonnie has had the opportunity to follow the incarceration of many prisoners, some of who are identified as political prisoners. Bonnie has maintained a particularly strong relationship with a man named Ojore Lutalo who was placed on February 4, 1986 in the MCU in Trenton State Prison. She says she was on the brink of giving up her activism when she met Ojore (Tapley 2012:5). Ojore, who was affiliated with the Black Liberation Army, wrote to the AFSC after the release of seven inmates who had accompanied him into cells within the unit. Ojore asked for further information on the unit in which he had been placed and for some insight into the reasons why he had been sent and the amount of time he would remain there (Kerness "The Hidden History" 2). Little did anyone know at the time that Ojore would remain in isolation in the MCU for twenty-two years.

Ojore's case, along with those of forty-eight additional inmates, were followed by Bonnie and the AFSC in a program called the Control Unit Monitoring Project, through which communication between organization and inmates was made possible through the transmission of letters, visits, and telephone calls (Kerness "The Hidden History" 2). It is through this forum that Bonnie and Ojore connected. Bonnie's efforts and those of the AFSC enabled multiple opportunities for Ojore to share his story via filmed interviews for local television stations and press articles. Throughout their communication, Bonnie maintained and continues to maintain, "political prisoners do not come out of solitary confinement sick- they understand why they have been put there by the system (personal

interview, September 11, 2013). She has explained how she views the no touch torture occurring within these units:

I use human rights, which is a concept of the United Nations, as a vehicle to talk about the torture that's being committed in United States prisons. The United States puts people in isolation because of their political beliefs. Control units. Those are isolation units. Those are no touch torture units. You know it's not that they're abused physically. It's not that they're abused chemically which goes on in US prisons. It's that they're abused with sensory deprivation [...] [Voices of Hope Productions]

Bonnie's personal connection with Ojore has informed and strengthened her upkeep of such ideas, and they have continued to work together since Ojore's release from prison in 2009.

Within the past five years, Bonnie and Ojore have been integral in each other's goals of spreading awareness about the issues of solitary confinement. They have collaborated on numerous speaking engagements revolving around issues of race, ethnicity, gender, age, conditions in solitary confinement and varying cell types where they espouse broader systemic change to the criminal justice system and draw parallels between a war at home and military action through wars waged abroad. Bonnie describes this idea in her talk delivered with Ojore at Connecticut College on April 16, 2014, entitled "Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art". She stated:

For me, I cannot have peace while this country continues its imperial outreach waging genocidal war at home, and in the wider world in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the drone and low intensity wars the US is waging in Pakistan, Yemen, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Somalia, Columbia and Venezuela. We need to alter the very core of every system that slavery, white supremacy and poverty has given birth to, especially the criminal justice system, which often related directly to US militarism. [Kerness, personal interview, April 16, 2014]

They both see the importance in recognizing connections between what they see as inhumane practices in prisons and “the punishment regime” implemented on a global scale through warfare and oppression, according to Bonnie (personal interview, April 16, 2014). Bonnie and Ojore have additionally presented Ojore’s documentary at film festivals, his artwork at numerous lectures, talks, and exhibitions at accredited universities and houses of worship, and have spoken for various interviews and programming. They travelled to Connecticut College to give the lecture, a question and answer session, and an exhibition of Ojore’s collages. “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art” covered ties between the political, economic, and social inequalities of the prison system in conjunction with commentary on the nature of prison architecture. Further commentary and analysis of this event will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Figure 10  
*Radical Teacher Bonnie Kerness*



*Note:* Collage created by Ojore Lutalo with quotes from activist, Bonnie Kerness.

Despite her many involvements, raising, and spending time with family, Bonnie still finds the time to answer emails, make phone calls, and speak with people who share her interests and goals. Her notes to me were always appreciative, positive, perceptive, and came in quickly in response to my inquiries. A typical response would appear as such, “Sarah, when it is convenient for you. I can be available from about 1 on today and tomorrow is good as well. I’ll be away from the computer until about noon. Thank you so much for your kindness! I’m looking forward to talking with you. Bonnie” (email to author, September 11, 2013). It has been eye-opening to personally witness and hear

about the dedication Bonnie gives as she reaches out to others or responds to their inquiries. I was particularly amazed to learn about the multitude of letters that have come across her desk over the years.

The letters that Bonnie receives come from men, women, youth, and families of prisoners. These come from people of a wide range of races, genders, religions, political beliefs, and economic standings. Some are victims of sexual abuse and some are leaders of indigenous groups. In the 1990s, she began to receive letters from individuals placed in security threat group management cells who were isolated for perceived gang affiliations and along the basis of racial and ethnic profiling. She also receives letters coming from those advocating for isolated prisoners with mental illnesses and those who begin to exhibit signs of poor mental health while in isolation. Such letters corroborate her belief that solitary confinement constitutes no touch torture. Bonnie described a letter in her August 10, 2013 speech at the Riverside Church, which she received regarding a Californian inmate who covered himself in his own excrement while confined alone. The reaction from guards was to bathe the inmate in hot water, which effectively scalded thirty percent of the man's skin off his body (Kerness "The use of Isolation" 2013). Bonnie relates the range of psychological impacts she hears from the voices in the letters to her audiences at speaking engagements and in the interviews in which she participates. She once stated:

You see prisoners cutting themselves just to feel something. The political people have more of an understanding of why they are there but that doesn't mean they don't suffer symptoms of the conditions as well. We talked about tunnel vision but it's not the same severity of mental illness that could be in a wider population. [Pepitone]

The differentiated experience of isolation has opened her eyes, yet it has also had its own impacts on her personally.

I asked Bonnie in our second interview, “What is the most difficult and the most rewarding part of your job?” Bonnie explained that reading the letters and speaking to the political prisoners from her generation who were isolated and struggled to share their stories have proven to challenge her yet continue to teach her more about isolation.

Bonnie worked with a student from Rutgers who was creating a documentary about her work who would regularly walk into her office in the mid afternoon to find her in tears.

Bonnie explained to me:

You can’t read it without being chronically shaken.” These things have never changed for people of color- they come right from slavery. These things are devastating for people inside in isolation. When you think of kids, they are grabbed right from youth. They are babies. They are given what are called “room assignments”- these just have a different name than “management control unit” or “ad seg.” [personal interview, October 13, 2013]

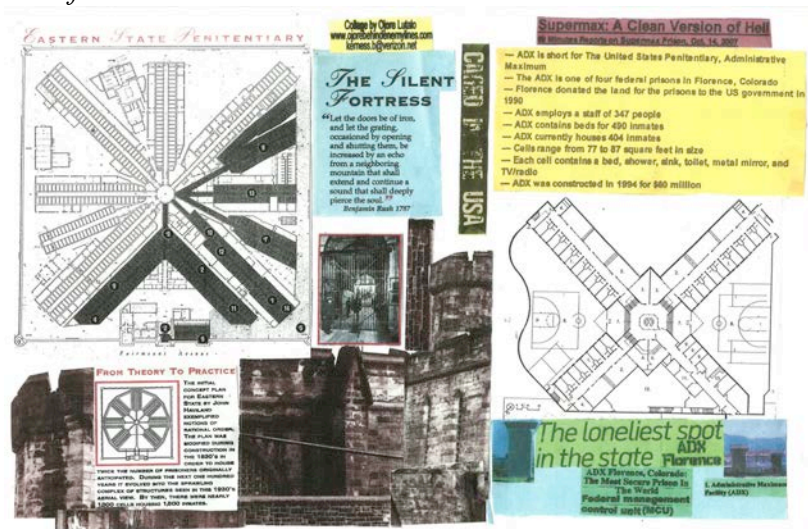
She became particularly passionate discussing the cases of juveniles who are isolated in detention centers as punishment for fighting or failing to abide by rules, as well as how more and more teenagers are tried as adults for committed crimes across the United States. Bonnie explained how the letters she receives come from youth as young as twelve and fourteen years of age. She is horrified by the cases of suicides among young people, like adults often for non-violent crimes. These children speak of being left alone in cold temperatures. These are youth who only get one shower per week, who are brought their food as is the case in the isolation units of adult prisons, and who are given medicines to sedate them or pepper spray to restrain them (Kerness “The use of Isolation in US Prisons” 2013). The same sort of restricted mobility and lack of education or training described by people on the inside in adult facilities appalled her (Pepitone).



After years of reading such haunting material, gathering narratives, maintaining contacts, and editing texts produced by the AFSC, Bonnie was diagnosed with chronic fatigue. This diagnosis came back in 1974, yet she has continued her work with the Prison Watch Project and AFSC's Healing Justice Program. Several day trips, travel, and long hours continue to plague her as a result of the strain and nature of this type of activism work, yet she says the efforts are worth it. Over the years, Bonnie has acquired a wide knowledge base surrounding the conditions of various forms of isolation, in large part from the letters sent to her. She has helped me to better understand the similarities and differences between the sensory experiences, or lack thereof, in various types of isolation. Bonnie described: "There are so many different kinds of isolation. The management control unit is utter silence, if you're in a punishment unit, very often the noise is chaotic [...] Cells are 50 in a row, you have 50 above and 50 below" (personal interview, October 13, 2013). In some isolation units, sound is a major facet of every minute of every day. Bonnie described some of these common sounds, for instance, the opening and closing of cell doors by automated means, the sliding of keys which creates echoes, and the chilling sound of cell doors slamming. These sounds are integrated as a part of the deliberate nature of prison design in such units. In contrast, Bonnie described how a prisoner from the Administrative Maximum Facility (ADX) in Florence, Colorado, wrote her about the overwhelming sensation of hearing himself cough as the noise bounced off the walls of his cell. He was so accustomed to hearing silence. She asked me why are such architectural design elements necessary in brand new buildings to create such an atmosphere when countless studies have shown that prisoners do not respond well to them psychologically. She supports the architectural organizations like the

California-based ADPSR, which is committed to eliminating the construction of prisons and cell units for isolation purposes.

Figure 11  
*A Clean Version of Hell*



Note: Collage by Ojore Lutalo created in 2014 for “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art.”

Despite the differences in levels of sound or ability to see other inmates in their cells, Bonnie described to me how most cells have certain shared features including a stainless steel bed, toilet, and sink. The walls must be bare of drawings or clippings from media sources, and it is often expected that any literature belonging to an inmate be kept under the bed. Bonnie finds it baffling that structural parallels can be drawn between prisons constructed in the last twenty or twenty-five years and those earliest penitentiary models from the late eighteenth century. She presented me with a pertinent example whereby many structural similarities can be viewed in the blue prints and aerial footage between Eastern State Penitentiary and the ADX facility in Florence, Colorado. Bonnie

has on numerous occasions in our phone calls brought up the profits made through privatizing prisons and federally subsidizing their construction, operations, and various programs necessary to their functioning. From such profiting from human incarceration, to social inequities, to the politics behind the criminal justice system, to the range of experienced psychological harm, Bonnie is dedicated to sharing her findings and beliefs with the general public, some of whom reject her ways of thinking.

Despite the adversity in trying to establish widespread elimination of solitary confinement as a prison practice in the United States, Bonnie Kerness believes that it will only come in the form of systemic social change. She feels it is her duty and moral obligation to teach others about a practice she profoundly believes is a violation of human rights. She stated in her interview with the Engaging People Series: Citizens Revitalizing Democracy:

Personally I would like to see a much more radical form of social change. I don't think there's any reforming our prisons today. I think we have to tear them down and as a society have a conversation about how we can sanction people who don't fit to live the kind of life you need to live to keep the promise for social change as a priority. It's not easy. Meanwhile, I plant seeds. [Voices of Hope Productions]

In planting seeds, she refers to the ways in which she passes along knowledge and elements of history not generally discussed or historical connections not regularly made. While she humbly cites current prisoners that write to her, her mentors, and the former prisoners of her generation who have been released in shaping her own knowledge and informing her opinions, Bonnie is a teacher and educator in her own right. She provides examples, literature, and contacts to answer questions about prisoner rights.

Bonnie said something to me, which particularly caught my attention, and I feel will always stick with me. It reminded me that trying to put oneself in the shoes of an

inmate in isolation circumstances is vital to understanding the range of impacts experienced. It was stated as follows, “To really know what isolation feels like, isolate yourself. “Sit down and close the door to the bathroom and read “Torture in Prison” [a source published by the AFSC]. Keep going back to the reading” (Kerness, personal interview, October 13, 2013). She has always pushed me to think outside the box, yet to call if I need anything As a champion of forward thinking, Bonnie works to spread her knowledge and discuss solitary confinement in stimulating ways.

**con•trib•ute** (kən trib' yoot), v., **-ut•ed,ut•ing**.

**1.** to give (money, time, knowledge, assistance, etc.) **5. contribute to**, to be an important factor in; help to cause. [1520-30; < L *contributes* ptp. of *contribuere* to bring together

*Random House*, 2nd ed., s.v. “contribute.”

All of the voices present in this section of the written thesis serve to highlight the push for decreasing the usage solitary confinement as a prison practice with an ultimate goal of eliminating it all together from prisons in the United States. The efforts of these individuals and their associated organizations described above demonstrate how activism within a number of academic fields and spheres of interest can bring together those on the inside and those on the outside in strong working relationships, even among individuals who have never met. Advocates, members of the public, and policymakers undertake significant collaboration to de-legitimize this institutionalized corrections practice that is believed to throw aside the value of human life through physical and psychological abuse. The goal of the section is to highlight the fact of their contribution, not how much.

Mother Theresa once said, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop” (Knotts 2014). This sort of mentality promotes action on the part of the individual for the betterment of collective society. This can be directly and necessarily applied to the issue of solitary confinement and the national community centered on its abolition. This is not to say that those who advocate the abolition of prison isolation must all work to the high levels of involvement and outreach demonstrated by these six individuals. Small but powerful strides may be made in simply sharing newfound knowledge and passion with someone

who is uninformed. Yet, if these narratives share nothing else with some of us, at least we ought to take away inspiration from those who have dedicated their time to advocating prison reform, and we must acknowledge our own potential.

## Chapter Five: Public Engagement Via Applied Anthropology

*But my point is that our graduates have been able to achieve all this because of their Connecticut College education, which dared them to think and do and lead: to develop their intellectual and creative capacities; to make the connection between the campus and the world; and to see their learning as an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to society, to pay their debt forward*

Katherine Bergeron 2014

To connect with people around the world, to make meaningful contributions, to open doors, to spread knowledge through shared passions and interests, to debate and in doing so widen one's horizons- these are the sorts of encouraging pieces of advice given to college and university students by their mentors in the liberal arts. Such remarks are shared a great many times during such a student's college career from convocation through graduation. As a graduating senior of a small liberal arts institution, I feel compelled to address the contributions I have made and have yet to make as I apply, interview, and am required to market my capabilities to potential employers. On the cusp of a new life stage, I am driven to find the practical ways in which I can translate my years of demanding academic study.

The above words of President Bergeron echo those of Anthropology Professor, Margaret A. Gwynne. They address the capacity of higher educational institutions to inspire students either to engage with the entrenched problems and injustices faced on a local, national, and global scale or find avenues for their given strengths. Gwynne that one of the purposes of higher education is to train graduates to think broadly and apply

the knowledge gained in useful ways that are also personally enriching and perhaps lucrative (Gwynne 1). Anthropologist John Van Willigen, who detailed the relationships between students and their educators, corroborates the statements of both Bergeron and Gwynne. Van Willigen postulates:

“To our students, interns, or trainees we owe nondiscriminatory access to our training services. We shall provide training, which is informed, accurate, and relevant to the needs of the larger society. We recognize the need for continuing education so as to maintain our skill and knowledge at a high level. Our training should inform students as to their ethical responsibilities. Student contributions to our professional activities, including both research and publication, should be adequately recognized. [2002:60-61]

These three authors address the validity and power of student research efforts, which stands in opposition to the goals of some for-profit institutions. These may focus on training students in a particular skill set to be directly utilized in specified future occupations. Yet in coming out of the tradition maintained at Connecticut College, I connect with the words of these three figures. I can see my own experiences and goals reflected in them.

In my years as a student of anthropology, I have come to respect the ways in which students are encouraged to engage with classmates, faculty, staff, and other contacts in meaningful dialogue that fosters knowledge sharing and alternative ways of thinking. Many of the campus events I have attended and classes I have taken have addressed the concepts of contemporary and historically based social, economic, racial, gendered, and technological issues. These are reflected in areas around the world within many different contexts. I think back to classes where we discussed child labor and the propaganda fed to child soldiers. I can alternatively remember examining the economic injustices experienced by climate refugees who would not be taken in by neighboring nations



despite the destruction of poor and low-lying island communities. I also consider events in which sexual violence and hate crimes steeped in the discrimination of LGBTQ individuals were addressed. In all of these moments and experiences, I was prompted to think profoundly about the systems in place that feed cycles of oppression specific to certain locales, cultural groups, and more broadly around the world.

Discussing and weighing in on these heavy topics enabled me to focus in on one controversial issue of particular interest to me- that of solitary confinement as a correctional practice. I was able to broaden my own holistic understanding of the different layers inherent to solitary confinement over several years of study and eight months of correspondence, interviewing, and conversations with experts in their given fields. After examining the practice in terms of social, political, economic, spatial, psychological, gendered, and race based factors, I felt that I had built up my knowledge base in ways that I could begin to translate into a forum for applied anthropological work.

Applied anthropology is defined by George Foster in his 1969 work, *Applied Anthropology*, as:

“the phrase commonly used by anthropologists to describe their professional activities in programs that have as primary goals, changes in human behavior believed to ameliorate contemporary social, economic, and technological problems, rather than the development of social and cultural theory.” [Van Willigen 2002:9]

The field emphasizes the anthropologists’ direct participatory role in the research process. The community or the organization with which the anthropologist is working often poses the research question to the anthropologist (Dobyns 1970:619). Such is the case with advocacy and collaborative anthropology (Van Willigen 2002:9). This sort of action is undertaken at the local, regional, national, and global level, and by anthropologists of

very different backgrounds, interests, philosophies, and techniques (Gwynne 2003:2,8). Topics covered often include issues of education, community action, criminal justice and law enforcement, architectural design, government and administrative decision making, industry and business, human rights, racism, and genocide, policy making, and social impact (Van Willigen 2002:8). These relate directly to the interest areas of individual actors within the community opposed to the practice of prison isolation with whom I have worked for this thesis.

Within the discipline of the applied anthropology, the act of working and learning with others forms the basis for the variety of roles embodied by applied anthropologists. These individuals may serve as policy researchers who study on behalf of and with communities utilizing ethnographic and/or alternative approaches (Van Willigen 2002:3). Others may serve as planners who are central to the design process of programs, projects, and policies that are in the development stage, often also conducting research as part of their role (Van Willigen 2002:4). Others still serve as advocates who are directly acting in support of community-designed policies or trainers who prepare communities and individuals for future engagements. Additionally, public participation specialists work to shape educational efforts by tapping into media outlets and organizing open meetings (Van Willigen, 2002:5). Finally, change agents are focused on effecting substantial transformations, sometimes through research and action based anthropology (Van Willigen 2002:6). Many anthropologists, working from the applied angle, embody more than one of these roles at a time. Their overarching goals aim at fundamental change for the betterment of communities.

The field of applied anthropology was not one that I had previously explored to a great extent over my undergraduate years. I knew little about what it meant to approach anthropology in this practical forum as opposed to a theoretical one. I have only recently in classes with fieldwork components, had the opportunity to engage anthropology in a manner that resembles the sorts of activities undertaken by applied anthropologists. Over the course of my research and interviewing process for this thesis, I came to understand how activism and advocacy work are undertaken through working directly with organizations and members of the public on given issues.

In the context of prison reform, specifically solitary confinement, there are not very many anthropologists undertaking research and publishing works in the United States. However, I was able to speak with a professor of anthropology who studies prison policies such as the use of the death penalty and solitary confinement. This anthropologist, the same referenced in earlier chapters, had the opportunity to continue working on these issues through several fellowships. She stated that the fellowships, “allowed me to integrate my highly abstract theory and method concerns in anthropology with perspectives on engagements and opportunities to enact those perspectives” (email, February 20, 2014). While her involvements were undertaken in the interest of pursuing personal research, this anthropologist also discussed the importance of building relations with organizations and campaigns that share the same goals and values.

Given that this anthropologist considers “the flip side of rapport building to be the debt of reciprocity owed for rapport achieved,” she wrote to me regarding how she “looked for ways to offer reciprocity within the constraints of moral compass” (email to author, February 20, 2014). She also explained the networking and communication

undertaken to conduct her research from within the prison and death penalty abolitionist movements. This was coupled with her role as a professor through which she has been able to share her knowledge about these prison practices, mechanisms for control and punishment, and the difficulties facing inmates upon release from prison without rehabilitative programming. It became clearer to me in speaking with this anthropologist and the nine other individuals I interviewed or posed questions, that I had the ability to continue working directly with members of the prison isolation abolitionist community. I chose to do this by coordinating an event for my campus community and interested members of the public that focused on increasing awareness about the nature of solitary confinement.

### **Coordination of a Campus Event**

I began the process of coordinating this event back in mid-December 2013 after several months of correspondence and speaking with Bonnie Kerness and Ojore Lutalo of the AFSC. Bonnie had mentioned how she would be interested in coming to Connecticut College in one of our phone conversations. I extended the invitation to Bonnie and Ojore, and we began to plan the details for the visit. The event ultimately came to consist of an introduction to the connection between my honors thesis and this event given by my thesis adviser, an introduction to the event and the speakers given by myself, a talk given by Bonnie with time following it to walk around and view the collages, and a question and answer session. There were opportunities following the event for further walking tours of the exhibit and discussion with Ojore and Bonnie.

Figure 12  
Students Look at Collages By Ojore Lutalo



*Note:* Photograph taken by author of students engaging with collages at “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art” on April 16, 2014.

Between mid-December and mid-April, I organized the event, paying particular attention to several central areas including fundraising, advertising, and rapport building with the speakers. The event would require accounting for transportation fees for the trip from Newark and around New London, hotel costs, food expenses, the provision of honorariums, and publicizing costs. Publicizing the event for the highest turnout was another major piece of the planning efforts. I designed several editions of a poster to engage the campus community and promote attendance through evocation of the design aesthetic found in the collages Ojore would bring to exhibit. I had the final poster printed in several different sizes, hung them around campus, and sent the poster via email to the heads of departments or campus groups that had helped to co-sponsor the event. I

maintained social media and networked with other campus organizations, including the Student Activities Council and the Anthropology Department, to spread the word about the event. Additionally, I drew up a brief description of the event that was sent to professors so that they might invite their students and co-sponsoring groups periodically leading up to the event to request aid in spreading the word about the event.<sup>6</sup>

The organization of the event required months of engagement with the speakers themselves in working out a plan for the day's proceedings, making additions and changes to the talk component of the event, and producing an introduction for the speakers and discussion facilitation points.<sup>7</sup> I found myself serving an integral role in crafting the talk, and my feedback was requested at a number of points including during construction of the talk given by Bonnie Kerness and in crafting a title for the event. After some deliberation, Bonnie and I settled on "Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art." Bonnie and Ojore will use the "Behind Enemy Lines" portion of this title for some of their events as a provocative metaphor for what they and other prison isolation abolitionists deem abuses of power by prison administrators and the negligent U.S. government at the expense of inmates. The title was intended to describe the nature of the event as an art exhibition, while also presenting some of the topics that would be addressed by the presentation. These ranged from the political, economic, and social inequalities wrapped up within the practice of caging bodies in U.S. prisons, as well as the deliberate use of hard architectural designs.

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<sup>6</sup> The description paragraph for Departments and organizations is located in Appendix D.

<sup>7</sup> The full lecture given by Bonnie Kerness and the introduction for the event and the speakers is located in Appendix D.

Figure 13  
“Behind Enemy Lines” Graphic



Note: Graphic image designed by author for advertising purposes for “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art.”

As I reflect back on which techniques worked successfully to craft a presentation that would be both eye opening and thought provoking, I realize that I made use of a system employed by applied anthropologists to guarantee involvement and successful execution of a given project. According to *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*, the following set of five prescribed objectives provides a strategy for successful organization. The objectives are as follows, and are to be undertaken in this order. Firstly, the anthropologist must craft explicit goals and designs for implementation of the project.

Secondly, the anthropologist must harbor realistic expectations for the outcome of the intended project. Thirdly, the anthropologist must prepare an organizational framework so that no key steps are left out of the logistic process. Fourthly, the anthropologist must procure a sufficient resource base by securing financial investments and support in order to execute the project. This step will involve encouraging further active participation from funding sources. Finally, the fifth step regards the anthropologist's concern for addressing the entirety of the project by seeing it through from the early design stages through to an assessment of its accomplishment in achieving desired goals (Van Willigen 2002:72).

Although at the time, I did not realize that I was carrying out all of these steps, I have since been able to reflect upon the process of doing so through the lens of applied anthropology. In terms of my goals and designs, I chose to pursue the prospect of bringing these speakers to campus, based in large part on my conversations with them and their history of speaking engagements in a variety of venues. I strove to craft an event that would capitalize on their excellent speaking skills, that would be interactive with the audience and visually stimulating, as well as contain content that would be engaging for an audience with little background in prison studies. It was of particular importance to me to bring a forum for asking questions and creating dialogue on a subject that has been under-discussed at Connecticut College. I felt that it was important considering the College is a mere hour and fifteen minutes from Northern Correctional Institution, a Connecticut supermax prison, and in relatively close proximity to several other prison facilities of varying security degrees.



I hoped to make use of Bonnie and Ojore's extensive experience with looking at issues of prison reform across time and in the context of their activist efforts and experiences with isolation. Bonnie had the idea to incorporate ten-fifteen minutes of walking through the space after the talk so that attendees could spend some time reflecting on its content. During this time, Ojore walked the exhibition with a number of audience members to give further context and background to the events described by the imagery and text clippings on the collages. I designed the event to have a strong level of impact due to the radical politics discussed and the brutality described both by Bonnie from the stories she has received over the years in letters and by Ojore from his personal experience. I hoped that concepts of anarchy, modern-day slavery, and psychological no touch torture would incite students to think about prisons in different ways and deconstruct their stereotypical imaginings of isolation in terms of who is isolation and for what reasons.

On an functional level, I chose the 1941 room in the Student Center as it is a centralized location on campus, easier to find for members of the public looking for the event, and large enough to accommodate the eighty seats I had wanted to set up. I also worked with the Events office on campus to strategically place one twenty-two by thirty-four inch poster outside the student center to clarify directions for attendees. I worked with the Events office and the College's Physical Plant office to verify the materials intended for hanging the collages and to coordinate the setting up of the space with sufficient room for a podium, table for the speakers, and aisles around the perimeter of the chairs for viewing the collages. The speakers, the team of five students I had recruited to help, and I hung the collages in certain groupings for aesthetic appeal. We grouped

collages with related themes and hung them closely spaced so viewers would understand their relationship. We also alternated between hanging larger and smaller sized collages next to one another and horizontal and vertical collages for a more dynamic set-up.

In terms of realistic expectations for the event, I needed to address the capacity of both speakers to undertake the trip up to Connecticut and the rigor of the day's events, particularly with Bonnie's chronic fatigue as a factor. Thus, I initially planned the day with pockets of time for rest before the event, after the event, and before the train left the following morning. Although my intent was to publicize the event as much as possible for the largest turnout, I also recognized that the day available to hold the event had a number of other campus events hosted at the same time. Thus, I started advertising well in advance of the event, marketed the event to the departments that I felt would be most engaged with the material discussed, spoke about it in my own classes, and asked the faculty I had worked with to make announcements in their classes. It was necessary to consider the event set-up to pinpoint the best avenue for providing information in a way that would peak audience interest and insight positive dialogue with the speakers. The event's structure was proposed by the speakers and utilized due to its success at other venues in which a presentation of a similar nature was given. The structure enabled the concise presentation of information for auditory stimulation followed by the chance to move through the space for added visual stimulation.

I also recognized that Bonnie and Ojore had a certain level of expertise with deliberate architecture in terms of the accounts of conditions detailed to Bonnie over the years in letters and Ojore's personal experience of the MCU in Trenton. This is not, however, the area in which they most closely concentrate. I had originally learned from

Bonnie that early prison models, namely Eastern State Penitentiary, and functioning supermax prisons, build in the last twenty years had nearly identical blueprints. Yet, after speaking with Raphael Sperry of the ADPSR and researching extensively myself on these sustained design elements, I worked with the speakers to incorporate additional commentary on prison design into the talk. Ojore created several collages detailing the striking similarities along architectural lines between Eastern State Penitentiary, ADX prison at Florence, New Jersey State Prison at Trenton, and East Jersey State Prison for the exhibit.

Figure 14  
*Oppression From Above Officially Confirmed Same Design/Same Oppression*



*Note:* College by Ojore Lutalo. Created in 2014 for “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art.

This gesture was an incredible display of Ojore’s commitment to the event, and to reaching those students and staff at Connecticut College who would be interested in

architecture. It was one that moved me immensely on a personal level as Ojore had undertaken the time to craft the collages without my explicit request, and I had also entered this project from an interest in studying the impact of constrictive space on the human mind and the body.

In terms of the organizational framework established for “Behind Enemy Lines”, I made sure to develop a system for organizing my progress as I developed the event over time. I made steady use of a planner to set reminders for submitting materials and making phone calls to the speakers. I used email threads to maintain contact with the speakers and supporting faculty and staff. I regularly updated my budget document as financial changes were made. I used social media to recruit a team to help hang collages the day of the presentation, paying special attention to involving those students in the process of engaging further with the speakers prior to the event. Through this coordination of roles, I hoped to further their investment in the issues discussed based on the participatory role outlined by Van Willigen. He stated that this participatory framework requires the understanding of one’s role played in the particular project based on consciousness of the issues raised. My organizational framework was intended to promote knowledge sharing, collaboration, and empowerment on the part of students and to recognize existing problems with the American justice system and be inspired to share their thoughts with others (Van Willigen 2002:71).

In order to fund “Behind Enemy Lines,” I spent several months emailing and contacting department heads and campus organizations to acquire sufficient funds to cover the costs of producing the event, accommodating the speakers, and entertaining them while in New London. I ultimately ended up with donations coming in from fifteen

different funding sources. I had great assistance from the Anthropology Department secretaries who facilitated the transfer of funds and gave valuable advice relating to financial matters, the event's set-up, and accommodating the speakers' travel. I ultimately tried to address the project in a holistic manner by engaging the financial aspect of "Behind Enemy Lines" and developing interest in the event. I also strove to develop content that would push for recognizing the historical dynamics acting upon the continuation of the widespread practice of isolating inmates and promoting the awareness of the issues abolitionists raise in opposition to the practice. I my goal was to address the project in a holistic manner. I looked at translating the event from an idea into practice, and in doing so vastly improved upon my connections with the speakers to craft an event that both the speakers and I felt to be an overall success. An account of the audience showed that almost all seats were filled in the event space with over sixty students, five faculty members, one staff members, and three members of the public. The posing of insightful questions from the audience and praise given by attendees following the event lead me to believe that "Behind Enemy Lines" achieved an overwhelmingly positive response. The presentation of the speakers' material worked to entice the audience to question why prisons are not further discussed on this campus and to think about what broader constructions factor into that reality. Are people in the United States really just turning a blind eye to addressing the controversy surrounding our criminal justice policies? Is the lack of discussion a reflection of increased awareness of issues within prisons in some parts of the country as opposed to others?

As a student of anthropology engaging with the practices of applied anthropologists, the process of coordinating "Behind Enemy Lines" enabled me to think

critically about such broad questions as the two phrased above. I continue to ask myself why does the treatment of prisoners not consistently correlate with the original crime committed. What would have to happen for the abolitionist movement to witness wider and more timely reforms increasingly at the state level and ultimately at the federal level? In directly engaging with the community supporting the abolition of solitary confinement, I have begun to search for these answers myself. I have also had the opportunity to discuss my thoughts with activists working to eliminate the practice while “Behind Enemy Lines,” was able to encourage others to think about this topic, perhaps for the first time. As political prisoner and survivor of solitary confinement, Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (United Nations 2014). The objective is thus how to extend that knowledge so that it will reach the largest audience and in doing so continue to broaden activism within movements for prison reform.

Figure 15  
Students Walk Through the Exhibition



*Note:* Photograph taken on April 16, 2014 at “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art” by author.

## **Glossary of Acronyms & Abbreviated Terms**

### Organizations, Campaigns, Certifications & Events Referenced

ACLU:	American Civil Liberties Union
ADPSR:	Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility
ADX:	United States Penitentiary, Administrative Maximum Facility in Florence, Colorado
AFSC:	American Friends Service Committee
AIA:	American Institute of Architects
CURE:	Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants
LEED:	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design
NAACP:	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NRCAT:	National Religious Campaign Against Torture
NYCAIC:	New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement
SPUR:	San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association
UNAFF:	United Nations Association Film Festival

### Types of Solitary Confinement Referenced

Ad-Seg:	Administrative Segregation Unit
MCU:	Management Control Unit
SHU:	Specialty Housing Unit
SMU:	Special Management Units
Supermax:	Super maximum security prison facility

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Song Lyrics & Poems

#### 1. **Penitentiary Blues (1991)**

“ I’ll do anything for a home cooked meal  
Visions of fried fish, this shit can’t be real  
(Mike, you’re losin it, man) Well goddamn it, let me lose it  
Imagination strong, so I know I gotta use it  
I wanna go home, I wonder can I break out?  
This Penitentiary Blues have got me down, no doubt” (Convicts, not cited in bib yet)

#### 2. **What Ya Life Like (1999)**

“I know what it’s like in hell  
I Did a stretch in a triflin’ cell  
What you know about twenty-three and one  
Lockdown all day, underground, never seein’ the sun  
Vision stripped from you, neva seein’ your son”

#### 3. **What Ya Life Like 2 (2001)**

“When I was five years old, I realized it was a road  
But at the end, I ain’t seen lots of pots of gold  
I seen a long cell block, the box, the hold  
Six hundred fenced in- some innocent  
rotten souls” (Beanie Siegel, not cited in bib yet)

#### 4. **“Just One More Beautiful Day in Your Captivity”**

So smile  
And don’t let them see you sweat.  
Sweat?... Shit, how about  
Pure unadulterated hatred oozing  
From every core of your being  
And smelling the stink that comes off your dark thoughts  
When all you can think of  
Is dying, yeah dying  
Like a rabid animal in a cage  
Because you find yourself spending  
One more endless day in this  
Cold fucking cage that tries  
To steal the very life from your soul  
And you are no longer capable  
Of even shedding a tear.

And all around you is a rag tag

Assemblage of dysfunctional miscreants  
And pathetic deviants who can't muster  
The social or mental capacity of a  
Skid row wino who's spent the past  
Decade sucking sterno juice over a  
Bottle of Mad Dog 20/20

And just as you think you've found  
A moment of peace within your  
Dreams... You are awakened by  
The maddening screams of a delusional  
Psychotic who's just thrown  
A handful of shit from his cage  
Only to land in front of yours.

Yeah smile  
Because when the skeletons come rising out  
Of your closets to haunt your poor  
Misguided ass  
I'll still be standing righteous within  
The values of my own soul  
Even after your cages have claimed my bones.

Yeah...smile  
Because this is just one more  
Beautiful day in your captivity.  
- Derek Janson, Inmate

## APPENDIX B: **Research Questions**

1. What does solitary confinement look like?
  - a. What are its typical physical attributes in terms of space, sound, and time perception?
  - b. How do typical imaginings of solitary confinement, as they vary from person to person, align with the reality of these conditions?
  - c. How does American policy on solitary confinement differ from international commentary or policy on it?
2. Are there various forms or types of solitary confinement?
  - a. How do these forms vary from prison to prison, and state to state?
3. What does a typical inmate in isolation look like?
  - a. Is there a full list of all supermax prisons?
4. What is the range of typical crimes of those in isolation?
5. What is the length of isolation?
  - a. How is this length determined?
  - b. By how much does it vary?
6. What are the psychological impacts of normative sensory and environmental deprivation?
7. How does the impact of solitary confinement reach both inside the prison and outside?
8. Who makes up the community of people actively fighting against solitary confinement as a practice of the American penal system domestically?
  - a. What spheres of influence do these people represent?
  - b. How did they originally learn about solitary confinement and become involved in the movement to ban its practice?
  - c. How are their efforts interconnected?
  - d. How are they working to reach the awareness levels of the general American public?
  - e. What are their short and long-term goals?
  - f. What have been the biggest successes and the biggest challenges respectively?



## APPENDIX C: Interview Questions

**Bonnie Kerness**, *Director of American Friends Service Committee's Prison Watch Project, Prison Reform Activist*

- 1) Is there a viable way to have a good sense of numbers in terms of how many collective supermaximum SHU housing units, administrative segregation units, and management control units are in existence today?
- 2) In my experience talking with students, faculty, and friends- there is a pervasive feeling that solitary confinement is still largely shadowed from the public eye for those especially who are not in close proximity to such institutions despite the efforts of active organizations and growing media attention. Is this information that can be looked up in trying to map out where these institutions are?
- 3) I know that there are differences between the various types of prison segregation and the reasons for why individuals could end up in certain units (for instance placed as punishment vs. for someone's beliefs) yet is this information accessible to the public?
- 4) In the article you sent me on the use of isolation as a human rights issue, you mentioned the isolation of juvenile inmates. Can you speak a bit to that and what sorts of adverse mental effects these younger inmates might face with regards to their proper growth or necessary stimulation, especially if these are different from those effects that are documented and described from older inmates?
- 5) Can you speak a bit to the letters you have received and those that come to your organization, which you mentioned both in the article and in your Due Process taping with Sandra King from 2010?
- 6) Do these letters come from all over the country and who is writing to you? Are they ever writing from within isolation or do they come to you from individuals that have been released or families on behalf of individuals?
- 7) You mentioned the descriptions can be difficult to read in terms of conditions and mental and physical anguish. What is the most difficult in your opinion?
- 8) I have been looking in my research on relating crime with a societal view of abnormality in terms of stigmatization. Do you believe there is a link there, that abnormality and deviancy are treated as part of the same family (an antiquated concept that can be applied to witch trials in early Colonial America)?
- 9) I just wanted to hear a bit more about your experience working with the Quakers and the lens they bring to this issue especially since the Quakers realized early on that leaving one to their own devices was not a viable or productive rehabilitative or correctional strategy.
- 10) Can you describe the various types of isolation as they differentiate spatially and on sensory levels?
- 11) What is the most difficult and rewarding part of your job?
- 12) What is your opinion on the government's role in all these issues surrounding prison isolation?
- 13) What is your opinion on the role of education on these issues surrounding solitary confinement?
- 14) Is there a list of all the supermaximum prisons in the US available?

**Ojore Lutalo, Ex-Prisoner, Activist with the American Friends Service Committee, Prison Artist**

1. You describe on your Behind Enemy Lines Website how you maintained a strict schedule of exercise, meditation, and study. Can you describe this routine more in depth in relation to how you used your space?
2. Your art has captivated widespread attention for its unique perspective and its powerful use of imagery and words. Had you been an artist before your entrance into the prison environment?
3. On what levels has art impacted your experience of confinement?
4. Art can be a political statement. Were there fears that your political inclinations would drive you to try and “organize the prison” per say?
5. Can you describe what it was like to be in a prison within a prison, meaning a confined cell within a larger prison environment?
6. How were you impacted by the spatial orientation of that cell over time?
7. Can you describe what your re-integration process has been like these past five years or so since you were released?
8. What have been the most difficult challenges to face?

**Five Mualimm-ak, Ex-Prisoner, Prison Activist & Organizer with the American Friends Service Committee and the Campaign to End the New Jim Crow**

1. I am curious to hear you elaborate more on what sorts of therapy you would advocate for correction purposes.
2. Going off what you were saying regarding key issues of rehabilitation such as how will inmates upon release feed or house themselves, and how the community members treat them when they appear-can you describe how inmates might feel facing these daunting challenges or where they might turn for help?
3. I was also wondering how you came across the organizations in which you are now involved?
4. The idea of removing someone from the community they’ve been removed from and then place that person into solitary is a whole new spatial concept I had not considered and is very interesting from that angle. Can you speak a bit more to that concept?
5. I was wondering if you might be able to speak towards the artistic side of you which you described in the interview attached as a youtube video to one of your past messages.
6. I was wondering if art served for you additionally as a coping mechanism for the sort of life and environment you faced or served other purpose too.
7. Might you speak to the response you received from other inmates in receiving and requesting (these portraits)?

**Dr. Joan Goldberg, PHD.** *Clinical Psychologist, Private Practice, Newton, MA*  
(interview, September 24, 2013).

1. Can you describe the ego and the id in the context of identity?
2. What are contemporary terms used to describe identity if not classical terms such as “ego” and “id”?
3. How does Freud specifically discuss the interplay between the ego and the id?
4. What basic human needs do people not consciously realize they must have which may not be obvious?
5. What effects can sensory deprivation have on juveniles and adults alike?
6. What are your thoughts on American society as one that abnormalizes or normalizes criminality through deliberate prison holding?
7. Are there further source recommendations you might suggest for this research?

**Professor Ana Campos-Holland,** *Connecticut College Department of Sociology*  
*Assistant Professor*  
(interview, October 8, 2013)

1. Is the lecture series on Prisons happening this coming semester?
2. Can you explain some of your work on the prison environment?
3. What has been your experience in working with law and juvenile minors?
4. Have you come across concepts of imprisonment psychologically impacting growth or development?
5. Is it up to lawyers to bring issues surrounding solitary confinement to light?

**Professor Ann Devlin,** *Connecticut College Department of Psychology Professor*  
(interview, November 18, 2013)

1. Can you describe your study into prison architecture and psychology?
2. How do you go about describing the interplay between the psychological and the spatial in your classes?
3. Can you describe some examples you cite in discussing prisons in classes?

**Raphael Sperry,** *President of Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Reform,*  
*Architect, Adjunct Professor of Architecture*

1. When were you first exposed to the issues the ADPSR tackles in its petition like solitary confinement and execution chamber? Was it through your architectural background or in another context?

2. You clarified for Metropolis Magazine in your Q&A with Martin C. Pedersen, that ADPSR is asking the AIA to ban the design of specific types of prison facilities that are recognized as international human rights violations. It seems the ban will only change proposed prisons in years to come, correct?

3. Do you think it's likely that were a ban to be instituted that currently functioning supermax facilities might eventually do away with these isolation units?

4. Has your organization been contacted by members the current prison community, by families of those in isolation circumstances?

5. I understand you are a professor of Architecture at Stanford- how do you approach college students on these issues?

The purpose of this thesis for me is to increase awareness among the college community, and I hope when I ultimately defend my thesis, to present the information in a way that will make the most impact. DO you have any advice or thoughts on this?

6. What doors have the Soros Justice Fellowship opened up for you and your goals?

7. What has surprised you most from your work with ADPSR and also on this petition?

8. Have you been able to compile a list of where the supermax facilities are located?

9. Have you made your own visits to some of these facilities? What stood out to you on these?

10. How has this long-term dedication to this issue impacted you personally?

11. What are your hopes for the future for this petition? ADPSR mentions that it's not the rate of violence that has increased to land more prisoners in solitary, but rather "societal attitude" towards them. How can the civilian population be approached most successfully?

**Professor Keramet Reiter**, *UC Irvine Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law and Society, and Law*

1. From where did your interest in studying prison populations and ultimately conditions of solitary confinement stem?
2. What has been the most challenging for you in engaging with these issues over time?
3. From your research and analysis, why do you think prison administrators have so little judicial oversight?
4. Have you made your own visits to some of these facilities? What stood out to you most on these?

5. How do you approach the university students you teach on topics of prison isolation? What techniques do you find work most successfully to engage students?
6. What is the level of prior knowledge among students in your experience when presenting this information in classes?
7. I understand you are working on a book as well about supermax incarceration? Can you tell me a little about this? Does this sort of tie together much of your research?
8. Where should the first steps for judicial action on behalf of inmates in solitary confinement come from? States, federal level legislation? It seems that international proceedings have not had much effect on American policy on the construction of prisons designed for prolonged isolation and on the continued use of this practice.
9. Would you say that there is a what could be called a sort of “community or network” of people who have started to really look at these issues of solitary confinement in relatively recent years? Can you speak a bit about the ways in which people have connected or are working together on these issues whether in your experience or observation?

**Aseem Mehta**, *Yale University Senior and Co-Director of the Yale Visual Law Project’s “The Worst of the Worst” Documentary*

1. How did you first become involved with issues of solitary confinement?
2. I understand you are Co-Director for this film with the Yale Visual Law Project. How did you get involved with the Project?
3. From where did the inspiration for “The Worst of the Worst” stem? How did the Project choose to settle on Northern Correctional Institution as its subject of study?
4. How did the group of producers, directors, and editors come into being?
5. What did your role as Co-Director specifically entail?
6. (I am very impressed by the range of people whose voices are heard in this film) What was your role in working with those interviewed for the film?
7. How did the Project select those interviewed?
8. What surprised you most during the documentary’s production?
9. What element or elements of the documentary’s production was or were most impactful for you as a person?
10. What element or elements of the documentary’s production was or were most impactful for you as a student and your areas of study at Yale?
11. What was the most challenging thing for you in making this documentary?
12. What would you say were the Project’s main goals in creating this film?
13. What has the response to the film been when screened or shown?
14. Is there a specific target audience?

**Anonymous, Professor of Anthropology**

1. From where did your interest in studying prison populations and ultimately solitary confinement come?
2. What has been the most challenging for you in engaging with these issues over time? What has been the most impactful?
3. There seems to be quite a bit of activism and publications on supermax prisons and solitary confinement coming out of Arizona. Can you describe what it's been like to work in Arizona and how you came to the University there?
4. "Lifetime Lockdown" mentioned you garnered 900+ hours of transcripts from interviews. Can you describe your interview process- how you structured your conversations?
  - a. What worked well? This I cannot answer as stated, but am willing to speak on the matter when we talk.
  - b. What were you hoping to gain out of each experience?
  - c. Was there anything you found surprising from interviewee responses?
5. How do you approach university students in your courses on topics of prison isolation?
  - a. What techniques do you find work most successfully to engage students? I cannot say that I have a successful techniques and certainly not one that I would consider most successful, which may say more about my teaching skills than about my students.
  - b. What is the level of prior knowledge among students in your experience when presenting this information in class?
6. Can you describe your experience as a Soros Justice Fellow?
  - a. What windows has the fellowship opened up for you and your goals?
7. Would you say there is what could be called a "community" of individuals or a "network" perhaps of people who have come to focus on issues relating to solitary confinement over time?
  - a. Can you speak about the ways people are connected from various fields from your own experience as a researcher and as an anthropologist?
  - b. There doesn't seem to be a whole lot of existing research (save you and Lorna Rhodes, other scattered individuals) on prisons coming out of anthropological journals at this time, but rather more from the perspective of psychology, law & criminology, and sociology. Does this have to do mainly with the difficulty of accessing the prison or are there additional reasons?

## **APPENDIX D: “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art” Documents**

### **1. Description of Event for Departmental Advertising**

**Bonnie Kerness**, Director of the Prison Watch Project of the American Friends Service Committee and **Ojore Lutalo**, a former political prisoner, prison artist, and activist with the American Friends Service Committee, will deliver a presentation, *“Behind Enemy Lines: The Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art”*.

The event will include a lecture and an exhibition of Ojore Lutalo’s collages made while in isolation at New Jersey’s State Prison at Trenton. The lecture ties in the political, economic, and social inequalities of the prison system in conjunction with commentary on the nature of prison architecture. Attendees will have the opportunity to spend some time looking at the art during the event itself, and a discussion will follow. The event will take place on **Wednesday, April 16, 2014 from 4:30-6pm** in the **1941 room** in Cro Student Center. There will be additional opportunity to view the collages and talk with the speakers following the event. *“Behind Enemy Lines”* is co-sponsored by various Connecticut College departments and organizations including Anthropology, American Studies, Art History, the Bernstein Lecture Fund, the Comparative Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, the Dean of Studies, Government, the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy, the Incarcerated America Lecture Series, Philosophy, Presidential Funding, Psychology, SGA Chair of Academic Affairs, Sociology, and Unity House.

Please direct students to the attached poster for their reference and feel free to send them my way with any questions. I am easily reachable at [sschnitm@conncoll.edu](mailto:sschnitm@conncoll.edu).

### **2. Full Introduction to Lecture and Speakers**

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you all for coming to “Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art.” My name is Sarah Schnitman, and I’m a Senior Anthropology Major here at Connecticut College. I have had the esteemed pleasure of the opportunity to work with the speakers here today as part of my honors Anthropology thesis on the broader impact of solitary confinement. Through interviewing and speaking with these individuals, I have learned a great deal about the nature of human rights activism as it relates to prison reform. Prisons are not places that have been the subjects of significant discussion on this campus, despite the fact that there are a number of prisons of varying security levels within an hour and a half from this campus. I thank those departments responsible for the Incarcerated America Lecture Series, held over the course of this academic year, and for our speakers today who shed extremely important light on the nature of prison facilities and the criminal justice system as it functions in the United States. It is my hope through this presentation, that your interest will be peaked and your awareness raised about some of the issues related to prisons and relevant in today’s society.

I would like to thank the many sources that have enabled this event to take place through financial assistance and publicizing support. “Behind Enemy Lines” is co-sponsored by various Connecticut College departments and organizations including Anthropology, American Studies, Art History, the Bernstein Lecture Fund, the Comparative Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, the Dean of Studies, Government and International Relations, the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy, the Incarcerated America Lecture Series, Philosophy, Presidential Funding, Psychology, SGA Chair of Academic Affairs, Sociology, and Unity House.

Without further ado, it is my pleasure to introduce the speakers for this afternoon’s event. They have come from Newark, New Jersey, to present today. **Bonnie Kerness** is Coordinator of the Prison Watch Project of the American Friends Service Committee. She has been a social justice activist for 45 years, and has worked up and down the east coast. Bonnie is the editor of a number of publications and editions through the American Friends Service Committee including “The Prison Inside the Prison: Control Units, Supermax Prisons, and Devices of Torture,” the “Survivors Manual: Surviving in Solitary,” and “Torture in United States Prisons: Evidence of Human Rights Violations”. She maintains significant contacts with other activist organizations from many fields and responds to the multitude of letters and drawings coming across her desk from prisoners, family members, and advocates. She is described as a “pioneer” who has laid the groundwork for activism on the abolition of solitary confinement.

**Ojore Lutalo** is a former political prisoner and current activist with the American Friends Service Committee. Ojore was placed in solitary confinement and held there for 22 years. He was isolated along the basis of his political beliefs and affiliations with the Black Liberation Army. During his time in isolation at Trenton State Prison in New Jersey, Ojore crafted hundreds of collages. Some detail his political beliefs, others the conditions he experienced and the design of his cell, while others still describe the psychological impacts isolation can have. The series of collages you see hanging around you are Ojore’s personal works that he has brought for the exhibition today. Ojore sells prints of his works from his website and participates in screenings of a documentary on his story.

Please join me in welcoming Bonnie Kerness and Ojore Lutalo to Connecticut College.

**3. Full Lecture Delivered by Bonnie Kerness, April 16, 2014**

Behind Enemy Lines: Politics and Economics of Prisons Through Art  
Connecticut College, New London, Ct.

By Bonnie Kerness, MSW

Coordinator, American Friends Service Committee  
Prison Watch Program

April 16, 2014



My early observations of oppression in this country began when I was 12 watching television and seeing children of African descent my age in the South being hosed by police and bitten by dogs for trying to go to school. I spent ten years in the civil rights movement, then moved north and began working with the American Friends Service Committee, the social action arm of the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers, who have a 300-year history of commitment in dealing with human rights issues with prisoners. I serve as a human rights advocate on behalf of men, women and children in prison throughout the US, coordinating Prison Watch for the AFSC in Newark. Many of the men, women and children that I take testimony from call their imprisonment “the war at home”.

In the criminal justice system, the politics of the police, the politics of the courts, the politics of the prison system and the politics of the death penalty are a manifestation of the racism and classism which governs the lives of all of us. Every part of the US criminal justice system falls most heavily on the poor and people of color, including the fact that slavery is mandated and institutionalized in prisons by the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the US constitution, which reads “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States”. While most of us don’t give this amendment a second thought, it is at the core of how the labor of slaves was transformed into what people in prison call neo-slavery. The use of prison labor occurs throughout the country and is an integral part of what we have come to know as the “Prison Industrial Complex”. If you call the NJ Bureau of Tourism you are likely talking to a prisoner at the Edna Mahon Correctional Institution for Women who is earning 23 cents an hour. Involuntary forced labor in prisons is every day real for the more than 2 million men and women.

African descended, Latino and Aboriginal young people tell us that the police feel like an occupation army in their communities. They speak about school systems being used to feed young people of color into youth detention, jails and prisons where those bodies are suddenly worth a fortune. People have said to me that the criminal justice system doesn’t work. I’ve come to believe exactly the opposite – that it works perfectly, just as slavery did, as a matter of economic and political policy. How is it that a 15 year old in Newark who the country labels worthless to the economy, who has no hope of getting a job or affording college – can suddenly generate 20 to 30 thousand dollars a year once trapped in the criminal justice system? The expansion of prisons, parole, probation, the court and police systems has resulted in an enormous bureaucracy which has been a boon to everyone from architects, to food vendors – all with one thing in common – a pay check earned by keeping human beings in cages. The criminalization of poverty is a lucrative business and we have replaced the social safety net with a dragnet.

There is no contradiction that prisons are both hugely expensive and very profitable. Just like with military spending, the cost is public and the profits are private. Privatization in the Prison Industrial Complex includes companies, which run prisons for profit while at the same time gleaning profits from forced labor. In the State of New Jersey, food and medical services are provided by corporations with a profit motive. One recent explosion

of private industry is the partnering of Corrections Corporation of America with the federal government to detain close to 1 million undocumented people. Using public monies to enrich private citizens is the history of capitalism at its most exploitive.

I want to share the voice of one young woman who said, “I was 12 so they put me in isolation. I heard children screaming. I saw boys get strung out on meds. They make you take sleeping stuff in needles. They used pepper spray on this girl who was fighting directly in her mouth and she couldn’t breathe. They kept hitting her. We told them that she had asthma, but they wouldn’t listen”.

The US spends less than any other industrialized nation on nurturing its children. In spite of dismal poverty rates, violent juvenile crime has been declining for years. Yet at least 43 states have passed laws making it easier for children to be tried as adults. We can’t escape the similarities with chattel slavery here as well. Not only are these mostly black and brown children taken from their families, they lose any chance for a future of their own choosing.

The voices of adult prisoners are haunting: a social worker at Utah State Prison wrote “John was directed to leave the strip cell and a urine soaked pillow case was placed over his head like a hood. He was walked, shackled and hooded to a different cell where he was placed in a device called “the chair”....he was kept in the chair for over 30 hours, being forced to urinate and defecate on his own hands which were tucked under him”.

Women who contact the AFSC describe conditions of confinement, which include enduring sexual abuse by staff with one woman saying, “That was not part of my sentence to perform oral sex with officers”. Some of the most poignant letters I get are from prisoners writing on behalf of the mentally ill – like the man in California who spread feces over his body. The guards’ response to this was to put him in a bath so hot it boiled 30% of the skin off him.

These past years have been full of complaints from prisoners and their families, describing inhumane conditions including cold, filth, callous medical care, extended isolation often lasting years, use of devices of torture, harassment, brutality and racism. I have received vivid descriptions and drawings of four and five point restraints, restraint hoods, restraint belts, restraint beds, stun grenades, stun guns, stun belts, spit hoods, tethers, and waist and leg chains. Often the worst torment people testify to is the psychological assault of “no touch torture” which can include humiliation, sleep deprivation, sensory disorientation, extreme light or dark, extreme cold or heat, extended solitary confinement including other forms of intentional placement situations. This is a systematic attack on all human stimuli.

In the mid 80’s the American Friends Service Committee received a letter from Ojore Lutalo who had been placed in the Management Control Unit at Trenton State Prison. He asked what a control unit was, why he was in there and how long he would have to stay. Some of the answers to those questions would unfold over the next quarter of a century that we monitored and advocated on behalf of Ojore.

“How do you describe desperation to someone who is not desperate”? began one letter to me from Ojore, who went on to depict everyone in the Control Unit being awakened by guards dressed in riot gear holding barking dogs at 1 a.m. every other morning. Once awakened, the prisoners were forced to strip, gather their belongings while feeling the dogs straining at their leashes snapping at their private parts. He described being terrorized, intimidated, and the humiliation of being naked not knowing whether the masked guards were male or female. If we think back to slavery and to images of the civil rights movement we know that dogs have been used as a device of torture for hundreds of years in the US.

Ojore spent 22 years day after day, week after week and year after year in NJ State Prison’s Management Control Unit, without being charged with any infraction. I challenge my intern students to spend four hours in their bathroom, and they don’t make it. Ojore not only made it, he managed to create, mentor and teach through what he called “propaganda”, which he would send out to me to share. His social and political commentary on prisons, what was happening to him, and his refusal to be silenced by the horror of his circumstances taught all of us. Ojore’s process of creating collages was to assemble headlines, pictures and graphics from what few newspapers, magazines and catalogues he was allowed. No scissors were permitted in his cage, so he folded, tore and glued the pieces of paper that formed his commentary.

Prolonged solitary confinement in the form of control units, security threat group management units, special needs units and communications management units, etc. has been a long time concern for many prison activists, on both sides of the walls. Control units surfaced during the 70’s when many in my generation genuinely believe we were free to dissent politically. It was during these tumultuous years of the civil rights era when large numbers of activists found themselves in US prisons. Sensory deprivation was used with imprisoned members of the Black Panther Party, Puerto Rican Independentistas, members of the American Indian Movement, the Chicano movement, white anti-imperialists, civil rights activists and members of the Black Liberation Army. In later years, we found jailhouse lawyers, Islamic militants and prisoner activists placed in extended isolation.

Current efforts to expand the solitary confinement population involve the alleged spread of gang problems in the US. The AFSC began receiving letters from people in street organizations placed in units called Security Threat Group Management Units, complaining of extreme isolation, brutality and racial profiling. The physical and chemical abuse in gang units is infamous to those of us who monitor the torment that these young people of color experience daily. The progression of the use of isolation is most recently known as “Communications Management Units”, which are specifically designed to restrict the communications of imprisoned Muslims with their families, the media and the outside world. This treatment of Islamic prisoners is replicated in US secret prisons throughout the world where almost all of those kept in such places are people of color.

*The transition from slavery to Black Codes to convict leasing to the Jim Crow laws to the wars on poverty, and political activism has been a seamless evolution of political and social incapacitation of the poor and people of color. The sophisticated fascism of the practices of stop and frisk, charging people in inner cities with “wandering”, driving and walking while black, zip code racism – these and many other de facto practices all serve to keep our prisons full. In a system where over 60% of those who are imprisoned are people of color, where 58% of African youth are sent to adult prisons; where black and brown women are 69% more likely to be imprisoned, the concept of color blindness doesn’t exist. Over 40 years ago, George Jackson noted: “The ultimate expression of law is not order – it’s prison. There are hundreds and hundreds of prisons, and thousands and thousands of laws, yet there is no social order, no social peace....the law and everything that interlocks with it was constructed for poor, desperate people like me”. Despite years of legislative work, laws have changed nothing for the better. As Ojore says, “We now have more repressive laws, more societal surveillance and more tyrannical prisons”.*

*In a system where 95% of prisoners return to our communities, the impact of these practices is felt far beyond prisons. Dealing with these issues of cruelty aren’t just a matter of human decency. Serious public health issues concerning prisoners coming out abound with mental and physical issues, including Hepatitis C, Tuberculosis, HIV, mental illness and symptoms related to post traumatic stress disorder. For more than 25 years, I have counseled people re-entering society from prisons, jails and youth detention facilities. The prognosis for staying out of prison is poor with over 60% of people returning. Prisons are often traumatizing places in the lack of feeling, concern and opportunities for self-improvement. Complex issues of reunification of families at the same time as learning how to build a life make re-entry an incredibly difficult period. How do you teach someone to rid themselves of degradation? How long does it take to teach people to feel safe, a sense of empowerment in a world where they often come home emotionally and physically damaged and unemployable? There are many reasons that ex-prisoners do not make it – paramount among them is that they are not supposed to succeed.*

I want to take a few moments to talk about the impact of architecture on prisons. As early as the 1847, Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia physician is quoted as saying of prisons, “Let the doors be of iron, and let the grating, occasioned by opening and shutting them, be increased by an echo from a neighboring mountain that shall extend and continue a sound that shall deeply penetrate the soul.” The role of architects in designing these torture chambers with deliberation cannot be under estimated. I’ve had people inside the Federal isolation prisons AD Max, that when they cough, the sound bounces from wall to wall. That level of echo and silence is architecturally deliberate. If you look at the blueprints of Eastern Penitentiary built in the 1840’s, and that of AdMax build in Florence, Colorado in the 1990’s, they are the same design. If you look at Ojore’s collage, you can see similar structure repeated throughout. In an 1842 visit to Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, Charles Dickens noted, “I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body; and because its ghastly signs and tokens are not so palpable to the eye....and it extorts few

cries that human ears can hear; therefore I the more denounce it, as a secret punishment in which slumbering humanity is not roused to stay”. His words have lost none of their sting today in his commentary on “no touch” torture. Nothing has changed.

Paradoxically, I’ve heard the awful din of noise when calls come in from general population, where the noise is so loud that conversation is impossible. The noise is soul shattering. This is also deliberately designed, a purposeful use of structure to damage human beings. One sign of hope for reform is that the group Architects/Designers/Planners for social responsibility is taking on the issue of solitary confinement in a way only architects can – they are demanding that the American Institute of Architects include forcible language in it’s code of ethics and “prohibit the design of spaces for killing, torture, and cruel inhuman or degrading treatment.”

*The conditions and practices that the imprisoned testify to are in violation of The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention Against Torture and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – all international treaties which the US has signed. US prison practices also fit the United Nations definition of genocide, which with this country has a long history. If we dig deeper into US criminal justice practices, the political function they serve is inescapable. Police, the courts, the prison system and the death penalty all serve as social control mechanisms. The economic function they serve is equally chilling. Just as in the era of chattel slavery, there is a class of people dependent on bodies of color as a source for income. The Department of Corrections is more than a set of institutions. It is also a state of mind. That state of mind led to Abu Ghraib, Bagram, Guantanamo, and what is going on in US prisons right this moment. You cannot give me a reason for the testimonies of the men, women and children that come into my life every single day. You cannot give me a reason for what happened to Ojore.*

*I’ve been part of the struggle for civil and human rights for over 45 years. My soul is haunted by what I read in my daily mail. For me, I cannot have peace while this country continues its imperial outreach waging genocidal war at home, and in the wider world in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the drone and low intensity wars the US is waging in Pakistan, Yemen, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Somalia, Columbia and Venezuela. We need to alter the very core of every system that slavery, white supremacy and poverty has given birth to, especially the criminal justice system, which often related directly to US militarism. The US must stop violating the human rights of men, woman and children. We need to decriminalize poverty, mental illness and in many cases, homosexuality. We must alter the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment and change the racial and economic profiling of arrest and sentencing practices, and stop the use of “no touch”, physical and chemical torture.*

*For me, I cannot achieve contentment while so many of my human beings are tortured in US prisons. Nor can I have peace while this country continues its imperial overreach waging genocidal war at home on the poor and people of color, and in the wider world in Iraq, Afghanistan, including the drone and low intensity wars we’re waging in Pakistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Columbia and others. I don’t know what your work in the world is or will be. Whether we work to stop war, end white supremacy or*

*oppose the oppressions of globalization, we need to see the ways these issues connect to the punishment regime.*

The AFSC has always recognized the existence and continued expansion of the penal system as a profound spiritual crisis, one that allows children to be demonized. It is a crisis, which legitimizes torture, isolation and the abuse of power. It is a crisis, which extends beyond prisons into school and judicial systems. I know each time we send a child to bed hungry that is violence. That wealth concentrated in the hands of a few at the expense of many is violence that the denial of dignity based on race, class or sexual preference is violence. And that poverty and prisons are a form of state-manifested violence. *Until we recognize that the system's bottom line is social control and creating a business from bodies of color and the poor, there can be no societal healing from what many consider this domestic war. We need to rekindle a national movement against torture and prisons among people who dare to believe that over 2 million men, women and children need not be imprisoned to make the rest of us feel safe.*