

## THE PROJECT

**States of Incarceration: A National Dialogue of Local Histories** is created by over 1,000 people in 28 cities, and growing. **We explore the roots of mass incarceration in our own communities—to open national dialogue on what should happen next.**

## THE FOCUS

States of Incarceration focuses on the past, present, and future of incarceration, exploring the explosion of prisons and incarcerated people in the US – including immigration detention centers – and its global dimensions. The project includes a traveling exhibit created by students and others directly impacted by incarceration from 30 different communities around the country (and counting); a digital platform ([www.statesofincarceration.org](http://www.statesofincarceration.org)); public programs held in each local community the exhibit visits; and teaching resources. The exhibit opened at The New School in New York City in April 2016 and has traveled to nearly 30 other cities.

## EXHIBIT COMPONENTS

The States of Incarceration exhibition consists of:

- **20 Local Stories** panels, each exploring a local history and curated by that community
- **4 thematic framing panels**, each containing a national thematic question around which the local stories are organized; you'll find very different answers depending on which community you are looking at.
- **Quote panels** featuring quotes and large-scale images from that locality that highlight some themes and broader questions.
- a tactile **interactive installation** that invites visitors to place themselves and their stories on a scale titled: **How Close Are You to Incarceration?**
- a **Timeline** comparing rates of incarceration over time and among communities today;
- a **Shape the Debate** mobile dialogue that allows visitors to contribute to the national dialogue and connects with the web platform.

## ★ SOI THEMATIC QUESTIONS

- Who is a criminal? What is a crime?
- Are criminals citizens? Are non-citizens criminals?
- Who works for prisons? Who do prisons work for?
- Where is the carceral state?



## PROMPTS YOU CAN ASK YOUR STUDENTS

1. What issues did you see in the exhibit that relate/resonate to your community?
2. What image/quote/fact did you find most moving or interesting?
3. What perspectives did you gain from seeing stories from other communities?
4. What fact(s) were you not aware of?
5. What stories/facts/perspectives do you wish were represented in the exhibit that you didn't see?
6. How would you describe this exhibit to someone who has never seen it to encourage them to visit?

**Small Group Setting:** Once the students are done going through the exhibit, break them off into small groups. Each group member should share a fact that stood out for them, and explain why. Once each member shares, instruct the small groups to think of a way they would like their chosen fact to change and what would need to happen/what could've happened to make that possible.



## QUESTIONS?

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<https://statesofincarceration.org/>

# DIALOGUE IN THE CLASSROOM

Students may have a variety of ties to incarceration, whether their own, their friends', or their family members'. Many may want to keep this information private. We recommend, however, addressing students' own relation to incarceration in the first class in a way that keeps privacy an option but also allows for a range of responses if students so choose. This can be done through discussion and/or a writing response to questions, which can be answered openly or discreetly. Some examples are:

- Describe a significant encounter you had with the police. (Or that of a friend or family member.)
- Find a short story, poem, or editorial that discusses incarceration and ask students to respond to it.
- What makes you feel safe? Do police and prisons make you feel safe?

It will be important to check in with students regularly throughout the semester regarding their thoughts about these issues. We recommend keeping track of responses, perhaps even looping back to the same questions at different points in the semester to gauge how students are handling these difficult topics.

## EXHIBIT SCAVENGER HUNT

1. In 1972, Marion Penitentiary in Illinois instituted \_\_\_\_-hour-a-day isolation cells called Control Units. Across the country, other prisons adopted this "\_\_\_\_\_" model developed at Marion.
2. From 1981 to 1990, \_\_\_\_\_ Haitians were interdicted and processed at facilities like Krome North and South in Miami, Florida. Yet only \_\_\_\_ were even eligible for asylum in the U.S.
3. The Vernon C. Bain Center, an \_\_\_\_-bed processing facility servicing all five boroughs of New York City, is currently the largest prison ship in the world. The purpose-built jail barge has been permanently docked in the Hunts Point neighborhood of the South Bronx since \_\_\_\_\_.
4. In 2015, one in every \_\_\_\_\_ residents of Louisiana was behind bars: the highest rate of incarceration in the world. A study found that black Louisianans are \_\_\_\_ times more likely than whites to be sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for non-violent crimes.
5. In 2014, the Correctional Corporation of America made \$\_\_\_\_\_ in gross revenue from more than \_\_\_\_ facilities across the U.S., including \_\_\_\_ in Tennessee.
6. In 1931, a group of "lifers" at the Norfolk Prison Colony formed the Norfolk Prison Debating Society. \_\_\_\_\_ later wrote that his time on the debate team gave him his first taste of public speaking.
7. In the 1990s, a new prison opened every \_\_\_\_ days.
8. In 1982, chaplain Peter Young introduced New York's first \_\_\_\_\_ program to the state prison at Mount McGregor. In 2014, the prison (and the program) were shut down.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ are the fastest-growing incarcerated population in the United States. Their numbers have increased by \_\_\_\_\_% since 1977.
10. Portion of African American men denied the right to vote because of felony convictions, 2010: \_\_\_\_ out of \_\_\_\_



## QUOTES ACTIVITY

The States of Incarceration Exhibition presents a lot of information and material on mass incarceration. This activity allows participants to reflect on their own reactions to the exhibit and any experiences they may have had with mass incarceration. Participants can then share these reflections with the group in order to begin exploring different perspectives on the issue.

### Materials Needed:

- A wall
- Something to write on: white boards, flip chart paper, butcher paper

### The Set Up:

Pick some quotes from the exhibit to use as a starting point. Copy down the quotes on large paper and hang them around a room where all the participants can see them.

### Instructions:

Invite participants to read each quote and choose one quote that they had a strong reaction to. They should "vote with their feet" by standing next to the quote they choose. First, they will have a small conversation with the others that chose the same quote.

Participants answer the following questions in their small groups to get the conversation going:

1. What was your reaction to this quote?
2. When you first came to the exhibit, what did you know about mass incarceration? What was your opinion about it? Do you have experience with mass incarceration?
3. How might that have affected your reaction?

Everyone can then come together, sitting in a large circle. Pose the following prompts to the group, allowing participants to answer each one before moving on.

1. In your small groups, did people generally have knowledge about mass incarceration prior to coming to the exhibit?
2. Did the quote you chose reinforce what you previously thought/understood about mass incarceration, or did it make you question what you thought?
3. What purpose do these panels serve in the exhibit?
4. What is the importance of different perspectives in an exhibit like this?