



# SOCIETY'S CAGE

HOSTING THE INSTALLATION



What is the value of  
Black Life in America?

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Society's Cage is a timely interpretive installation born in the aftermath of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor as our society reckons with institutional racism and white supremacy. The public installation features a bold interpretive pavilion sculpted to symbolize the historic forces of racialized state violence. The experience educates visitors and functions as a sanctuary to reflect, record and share personal thoughts. It is conceived in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement as a mechanism for building empathy and healing.

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Society's Cage was initiated by a team of designers in the Washington, DC office of SmithGroup as a grassroots effort, later gaining support from the firm as a lead sponsor for the installation.



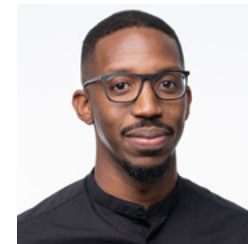
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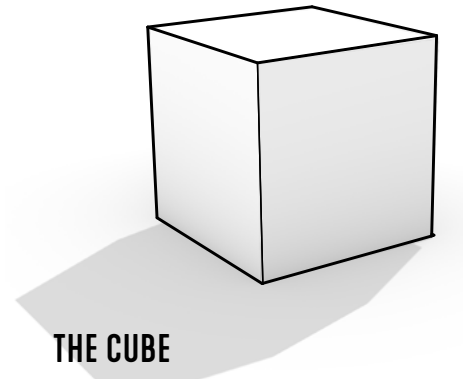
The murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor are not anomalies, rather they are recent examples in a 400+ year historic pattern of unmitigated, unbound, systemic anti-Blackness in the United States.





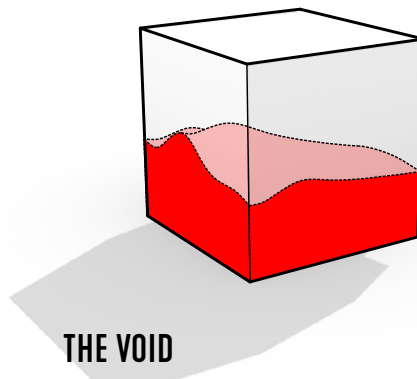


Weathered steel bars hanging from a steel plate ceiling form a perfect cube atop a raised 15-foot square platform, encircled with educational content around its base. Historical data for four primary institutional forces of racism are expressed on the cube's perimeter and triangulated within the interior, carving a void into which visitors can enter. Within this void the visitor experiences clashing senses, feeling both the figurative weight of oppression from the bars around and above them, while also being enveloped in an open-air sanctuary for reflection.



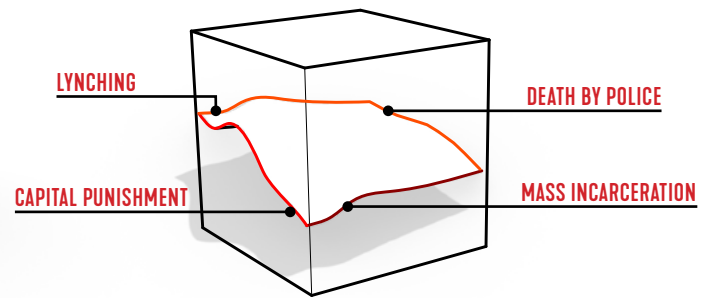
### THE CUBE

The perfect cube form suggests a fair and equitable societal construct.



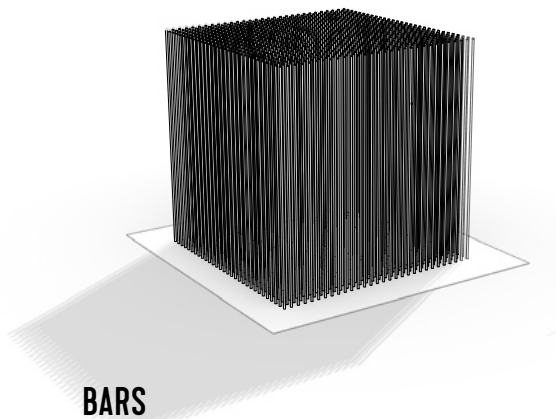
### THE VOID

Carved out of the cube, the void is an obstacle-filled path symbolizing Black Americans struggle for survival.



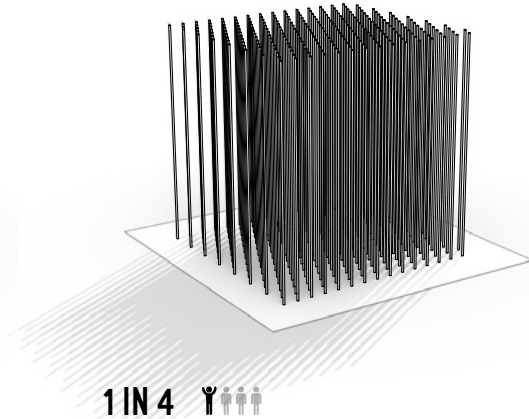
### GRAVITY

Data is physically manifested to demonstrate the odds stacked against Black Americans; inside, the weight of oppression is experienced.



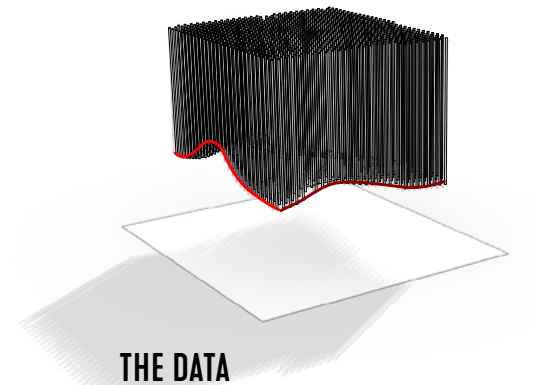
### BARs

The perfect cube of bars represents the systemic oppression of white supremacy actively subverting Black progress.



### 1 IN 4

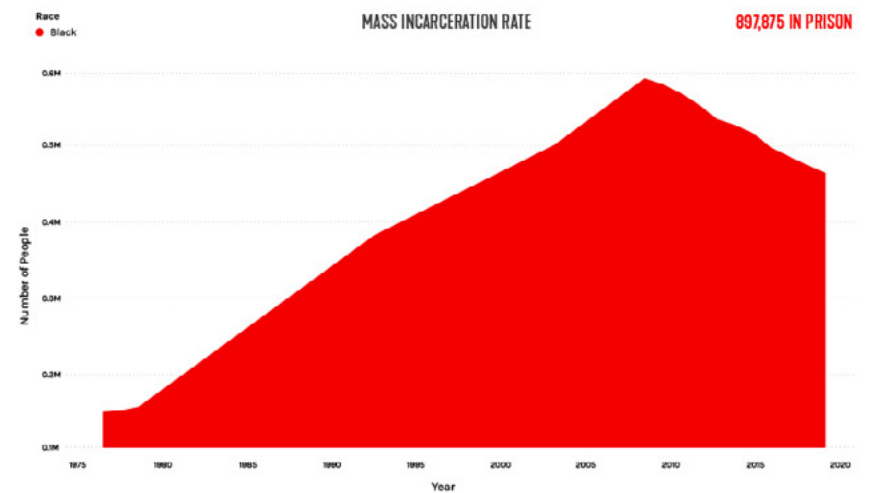
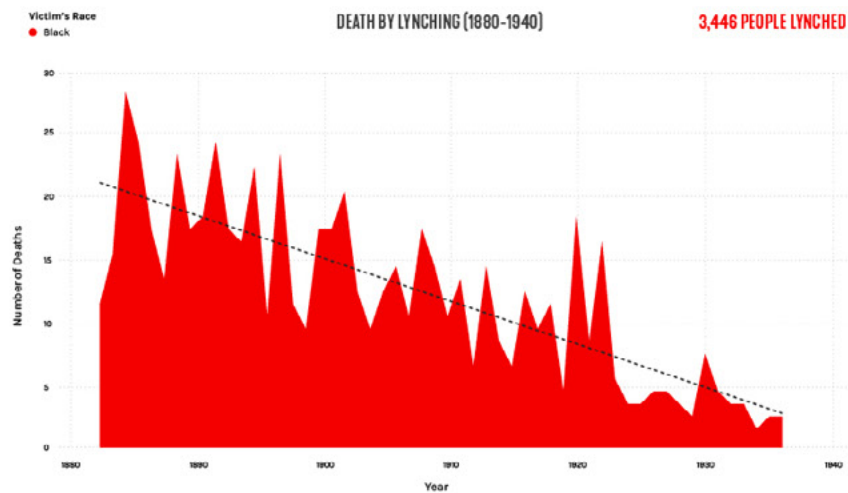
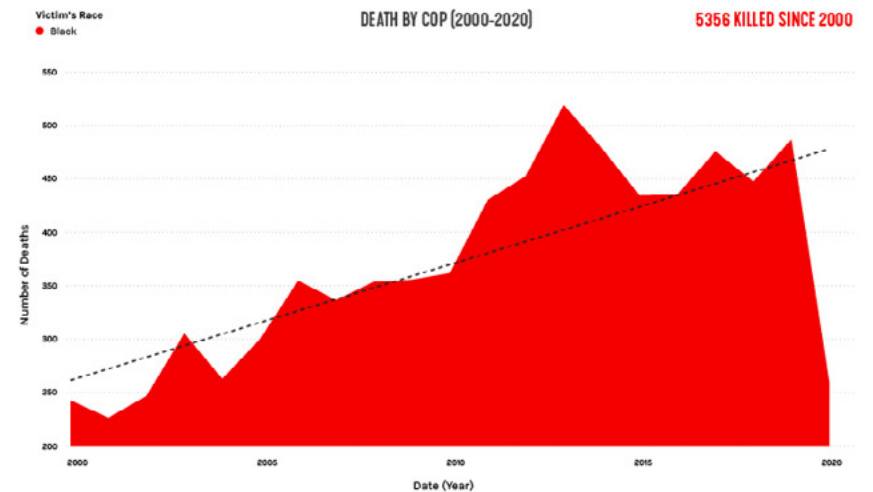
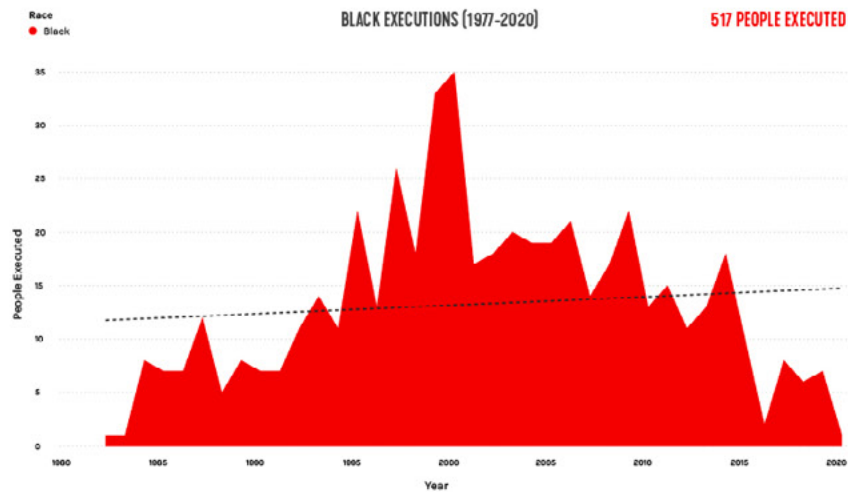
1 in 4 bars physically touches the ground, representing the statistical probability of being imprisoned as a Black American.



### THE DATA

Systemic racism creates obstacles in every facet of life: employment, housing, education, police violence, mass incarceration.











Visitors are encouraged to participate in a shared experience upon entering the pavilion. After holding their breath for as long as they can, evoking the common plea among victims of police killings, "I can't breathe," visitors then post a reflection of their experience on social media using the hashtag #SocietysCage. This exercise is meant not only to build empathy but expand the installation's impact online to allow anyone to participate in this shared exercise.

A **soundscape** was commissioned from a pair of composers, Raney Antoine, Jr. and Lovell "U-P" Cooper. Comprised in four movements, totaling 8 minutes and 46 seconds in length in recognition of the

time George Floyd suffered under the knee of police, each movement is themed to reflect each of the four institutional forces that sculpted the pavilion's interior (mass incarceration, police terrorism, capital punishment and racist lynchings).

An augmented reality simulation allows anyone to explore a digital duplicate of the Society's Cage installation from anywhere.

During the day, the installation is a monumental sculptural object, but after sunset the atmosphere of the installation is transformed making it an ideal platform for social and racial justice performance art.







Society's Cage was first installed on the National Mall, on a prominent site between the Capitol Building and the Washington Monument, at 12th Street and Madison Drive NW. It was timed to open with the March on Washington in support of Black Lives held on August 28, 2020 and remained open to the public through September 12, 2020. In those 16 days, thousands visited to read, acknowledge and reflect.





Society's Cage traveled to Baltimore, Maryland, at Baltimore's premier location for protest between City Hall, the Baltimore War Memorial, and Police Plaza. The installation received strong support from the Baltimore Organization for the Promotion of the Arts and the Mayor's Office.





Society's Cage traveled to Tulsa, Oklahoma for the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre with the support of numerous local organizations. It was installed including on the site of the Vernon Chapel AME Church (the last remaining structure from the massacre) positioned on Greenwood Ave - at the epicenter of the historic tragedy.







**39M**

TELEVISION REACH

**20M**

SOCIAL REACH

**43.4M**

EDITORIAL REACH

## **ARCHITECT**

Society's Cage Explores Institutional Racism in America

September 2, 2020

[STORY LINK](#)



What is the inspiration behind the Society's Cage exhibit on the National Mall?

September 1, 2020

[STORY LINK](#)

## **ARCHITECTURAL RECORD**

Designers Quantify Racial Injustice in Data-Driven Installation on National Mall

August 26, 2020

[STORY LINK](#)





[www.smithgroup.com/societys-cage](http://www.smithgroup.com/societys-cage)

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