Being locked down in solitary confinement (also known as “the hole”) is inhumane. I know. I have spent over 10 years total in the hole. During one time, the other prisoners and I had no human contact. We were kept in small cell for 23 hours a day. For one hour a day, five days a week, we were allowed to go outside. We were also deprived of heat in the winter time, adequate medical care, and respect as human beings. Our oppression caused us to unify and take a stand.

In order to change our circumstances, we needed to gain outside attention to our plight, so we mobilized a hunger strike. There were about 125 of us in the hole. When the hunger strike took place, we had about 110 prisoners participating. The administration was awed at our solidarity. They were forced to video tape every cell that refused a food tray. I had a sign on my cell window that said, “No justice, No peace. I won’t eat!”

Psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, doctors, nurses, and other staff came to our cells to persuade us to abandon the hunger strike, but we refused. So they hand-picked a few prisoners and placed them in a hard cell with nothing but a concrete bed. Then they sent pretty nurses manipulating them to eat. After they ate, they were sent back to the hole to discourage the rest of us to stop the strike.

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**DISCUSS** the meaning of that quote. **DISCUSS** the images that you see in the quilt. What stories do they tell? Why does the person handcuffed in the center of the quilt have a bullseye on his back and an orange suit? What problems have the artists posed, and what are some people doing about it? To learn more about prison resistance, read the article below by Curtis Braxton about prisoners who fought back against solitary confinement.
Beginning in the early 1970s, prisons have relied increasingly on isolation and segregation to control men, women, and youth in their custody. In 1985, there were a handful of control units across the county. Today, more than 40 states have super-maximum security—or “supermax”—facilities primarily designed to hold people in long-term isolation. There are more than 80,000 men, women, and children in solitary confinement in prisons across the United States, according to the Bureau of Justice statistics. (Note that figure is a decade old and doesn’t include people in jails, juvenile facilities, and immigrant detention centers.) Prisoners are often confined for months or even years, with some spending more than 25 years in segregated prison settings. As with the overall prison population, people of color are disproportionately represented in isolation units.

Curtis Braxton is an activist and a student of life. He’s been incarcerated since 1997, and he hopes to be released in the near future. He can’t tolerate oppression in any form. He believes power belongs to the people if we unite. He would like to hear from you. Write to him at: Curtis Braxton, DT 0787 Box 9999 Labelle, PA 15450

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Every day, people abandoned the strike and the administration turned up the pressure by cutting off the running water in everybody’s cell who was on the strike. This caused more people to relinquish the strike. They were doing everything they could to end the strike and to stop the public from becoming aware of what’s going on behind these walls.

To intensify the situation, I acted like I passed out and hit my head. I was escorted to medical in a wheelchair. This made the administration scared because by law they have to preserve a prisoner’s life. They can’t allow a prisoner to die of starvation. They are obligated to file an injunction with the courts to force-feed a prisoner.

Three of my comrades were sent to medical after me. We were the last ones left on the strike. Refusing to cooperate with medical, not allowing them to check our vital signs, we forced them to file the paperwork with the court to receive an order to force feed us.

We were taken in front of the judge and revealed the harsh treatment we endured at the prison. News of our struggle made local newspapers and traveled to Philadelphia—bringing light to what we went through and gaining support for us. We changed how the administration governs us in that particular hole—paving a path for those who come behind us. We won a battle in a protracted war to be treated as human beings. Our unity was the underlying factor in what allowed us to stand for what is right!