

## **Break down 'racial binaries,' says activist Jackie Sumell**

October 28, 2013 11:00 AM Hannah Dean  
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Artist, activist and author Jackie Sumell started her speech at Tulane University by discussing "racial binaries" and how they are used to define ourselves and other people ? terms such as black and white, good and bad, cowboys and Indians, "us and them" and most importantly, guilty and innocent.



At the Direction Lecture Series, Sumell decries solitary confinement and explains her work on Herman's House in honor of the late Herman Wallace, a member of the Angola Three. (Photo by Guillermo Carbrera-Rojo)

It set the stage for her talk on Oct. 21 in the Kendall Cram Lecture Hall entitled "I Wish the Indians Won: The Radical Practice of Dissolving Racial Binaries."

But Sumell then segued into the project that connects her to the New Orleans community ? [Herman's House](#). She is building a house to honor the life of Herman Wallace, a member of the [Angola Three](#), a group of inmates in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola who started the first chapter of the Black Panther Party in a prison.

The men spent more than 100 years combined in solitary confinement. Sumell began writing to Herman in prison. Eventually, she asked Herman what his dream

house would look like. They started exchanging sketches, pictures and ideas, which led to the development of her project.

On Oct. 1 the state of Louisiana released Herman, who was terminally ill, by overturning his conviction; he died three days later. Sumell continues to work toward the abolishment of solitary confinement in the U.S., and leads the Herman's House project, which includes an exhibit, book and [film](#).

She also spoke about the injustice of the prison-industrial complex, in which inmates in prisons like Angola work for 40 hours a week for between two and 20 cents an hour.

Sumell ended the lecture with a powerful charge to the audience: "There is infinite opportunity to do something amazing at any point in your life, as long as we can get over the impression that amazing is complex."

Her talk was part of the [Direction Lecture Series](#).

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