

Riotsville, U.S.A

Film Screening Toolkit

Table of Contents:

Overview

The Basics of a Film Screening

Following-Up After Screening a Film

Film Discussion Guide

OVERVIEW:

For over 20 years, SONG's work has centered the leadership development of LGBTQ people of color, working class, rural and Southern folks through political education, relationship-building, and cultural work. Art, music, film and other creative endeavors have been key to building SONG's kinship network and it is in that spirit that we offer this Film Series Toolkit as a way to pave the road for building community and dialogue amongst our regional membership and with other LGBTQ people in the South.

For many years, SONG co-founder Mandy Carter used to travel the South when she worked at SONG showing films and having discussions with other LGBTQ, rural, immigrant, people of color. Many people still call the office and say Mandy Carter was the first 'out Black lesbian I ever saw.' This brilliant and simple strategy both built base (our numbers, people in relationship to SONG), build kinship and build conversation - using film as an entry point to reflect in our individual and collective experiences.

In honor of her work, legacy and the deep desire and hunger for us to be together, in community, and to see LGBTQ legacy, experience and social upheaval we offer a simple tool for How To plan your own Film Screening (or Series) and Discussion in your town.

We see this as an important opportunity to begin planting seeds of resistance through cultural organizing work that builds beloved community among LGBTQ Southern people. Film Screenings can offer a space for community building and coming together with our people; it allow us as LGBTQ people to gather and build together, wherever we live, weather we are OUT or not. Films, like other forms of Art & Culture, connect to our heart and soul in ways that sometimes a regular conversation cannot.

It is in the spirit of creative resistance that we offer this working toolkit to our members throughout the region. Got questions, feedback or some extra support in setting up a film screening or series?? Call us at 404-549-8628 or email takeaction@southernersonnewground.org

Also included in this toolkit is a document on SONG's suggestions for Best Practices for Facilitation in order to support our members in holding these discussions after screening the films. Our hope is that we will be able to evaluate and get feedback with and from SONG members who use this toolkit and organize a Film Series in their town and communities.

Organizing a Film Series: The Basics

Recruit & Build a Small Crew:

- Ask a friend or two if they are interested in helping with an LGBTQ Film Series! It is still possible to do this on your own but it also doesn't hurt to collaborate!
- Decide what roles need to be filled: Outreach & Promotion, Logistics, Facilitation, Follow-Up

Set a Date and Location:

- Give yourself 4-5 weeks of planning time before your first film screening. Decide if you will do a series or just a one time film screening. If a series, we recommend choosing dates for all of the film screenings from the beginning, spreading them out to every two 2 weeks or every month. Decide:
 - Number of showings
 - Spacing of showing
 - Dates of showing
 - Consider a regular date, which offers an advantage in arranging rental and is easier to remember
 - End of month showing allows for publicity to build up all month
 - Consider possible conflicts, e.g., art fairs, holidays, school event, etc.
- Think about hosting your film screening on an evening, weekend afternoon or time that will work for you and your intended audience; we recommend something that starts earlier so you can break bread together and hold discussion.
- You should also make a decision about where you will be screening this film ***
- Different films have different requirements for public screenings. Check out the section below on the Legal Rights Chart for more information on the different requirements of the films in this toolkit.

Locations for screening

- Local Library:
 - We recommend reaching out to your local library to see if they are willing to co-sponsor or at least provide a venue for your film screening or series. Libraries are typically good locations because they provide neutral, well known and often free space.
 - Libraries may already have legal viewing rights to the films if they already have been purchased. Or, often times they will go ahead and purchase the film.
- LGBTQ-Affirming places of worship
 - Is there an Metropolitan Community Church (MCC's are known as the 'gay church' in many places across the U.S.) in your town?
 - Any other LGBTQ-affirming churches?
- In your home
 - When unsure about screening rights or if the safest option will be to host the film screening in someone's home, we encourage you to do so. While hosting a film screening in a public setting is ideal, there are some advantages to hosting it in a private home:
 - First, you do not have to worry about paying for screening rights or running the risk of coming up against legal challenges.
 - Hosting a film screening in someone's home also allows for some more intimacy and flexibility in how you set up the space. check out our Alchemy of Collective Space tool for more information on how to create a welcoming space.

Getting the Word Out:

- Make a physical flyer as well as one for social media with the date, time, location, film, logistics; we also suggest using a great, user-friendly app like Canva to do this. You can access a template here: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGT78BsOtc/CRBew_OZL9zfiFdJgi4viQ/edit
- Make an explicit decision about 1) if this is a public event vs. a smaller, more intimate gathering at you or your friends home; and 2) decide if its open to LGBTQ people and allies OR just LGBTQ people.

- Make an invite list! Include friends, acquaintances, people from your church/place of worship, school, community groups, etc.
- Give out physical flyers, make an event on facebook, send personal email invites, make phone calls!
- **Explicitly ask (and get agreement from :)) 5 of your friends to bring 1 friend of theirs that you don't know**
- Ask SONG staff if there are other members/SONG family in your area (ex. within 50 miles) We have found that when saying LGBTQ people and allies in outreach materials, it allows and supports folks that are closeted to more comfortably attend. We also recommend being prepared to encourage more outspoken allies to listen and be quiet instead taking up a lot of space during the conversation.

Logistical Preparation:

- **SPACE.** Once you've set a location and the word is getting out about your event, start thinking about how you're going to set up the space so that it's warm, comfortable and welcoming [See SONGs Alchemy Tool for more on our reflections on building collective space].
- **FOOD.** Make a decision about food logistics at the same time you make a decision about location and date so that information about food will already be included in your outreach materials.. We suggest deciding on one of two options: 1) Make the event a potluck and ask everyone to bring a dish to share or 2) Ask a local business to donate some food to your event and let them know that in return you will promote them during your film screening [contact SONG for more information on getting grassroots donations from local businesses].
- **FACILITATION.** Decide the who and how of facilitating discussion during the film screening. We suggest 1-2 facilitators who will be familiar with the film, prepare the discussion using the guide provided by SONG and facilitate a dialogue among the group. We recommend that this be structured conversations between everyone who came and not necessarily a panel. See attached discussion guides and SONG's Tips on Facilitation below.

NEXT STEPS:

- Make sure you collect and keep the sign-in list with everyone's contact information who showed up to the event
- See if there is interest in doing it again! Do people want to work together and help with the planning of the next screening??
- Look out for the folks in the room that came early and stayed late, helped out and lended a hand, that did what they said they were gonna do (brought the beans! etc.), Let us know how it went. We should include contact info - and say we are also on deck to support
- Send a follow-up email to the folks that came out that includes: A Thank You for Attending, Some Highlights of the film discussion, and information about the next film screening, when it will be and how folks can help organize the next one.
- Reach out to SONG staff [kindred@songsouth.org] to let us know how your event went! We will be happy to troubleshoot, problem-solve or brainstorm future action steps with you!

Riotsville, U.S.A Discussion Guide

NAME OF FILM: Riotsville, U.S.A. (Sierra Pettengill, 2022, 91 minutes)

WHERE IT CAN BE FOUND: Watch Riotsville, USA with a subscription on Hulu, rent on Fandango at Home, Prime Video, Apple TV, or buy on Fandango at Home, Prime Video, Apple TV.

SYNOPSIS/OVERVIEW

Welcome to RIOTSVILLE, USA, a turning point in American history where the protest movements of the late 1960s came into conflict with increasingly militarized police departments. Focusing on unearthed military training footage of Army-built model towns called "Riotstilles," where military and police were trained to respond to civil disorder in the aftermath of the Kerner Commission created by President Lyndon B. Johnson, director Sierra Pettengill's kaleidoscopic all-archival documentary reconstructs the formation of a national consciousness obsessed with maintaining law and order by any means necessary. Drawing insight from a time similar to our own, RIOTSVILLE, USA pulls focus on American institutional control and offers a compelling case that if the history of race in America rhymes, it is by design.

KEY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What can we learn from history about the state from the Kerner Commission created by President Lyndon B Johnson? What is similar or different now?
- What other parallels can we make between the film and our current fight to Stop Cop Nation?
- What is the role of the "outside agitators" narrative?
- How do we fight propaganda? How do we craft our own narratives?
- What is the role of media in this film? What can we observe about it's role in telling the story of resistance?
- How do we resist in times of so much state repression? What considerations do we need to navigate these waters? What can we learn from the past?

KEY QUOTES TO USE

"When 10 Black people link up its a riot, when 300 white people show up its a convention"

How is this different or the same for Queer and Trans folks or a multiracial coalition? How do we take back this narrative? As abolitionists, how do we imagine new possibilities?

Re: "policies of economic neglect" - Where do we see these policies today?

KEY SCENES TO USE

- The spectacle of watching training exercises at Riotstille
- Building the Riot Posse
- White women at the gun range