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New Documentary on Mass Incarceration at Film Festival, Panel with Filmmaker and Local Advocates to Follow

Lewiston: Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (M-PAC) recently celebrated the defeat of a proposal that could have opened the door to privatizing state prisons. America's largest private prison corporation, Corrections Corporation of America, has offered to buy state prisons across the country. So far states are not biting even in this continuing difficult economic climate. Private prisons are becoming increasingly unpopular even in a country that has become shockingly comfortable with incarceration.

Nationally, the prison population has reached nearly 2.5 million. The U.S. has just 5% of the world's population, but 25% of the world's prison population.

Incarceration and racial disparities within criminal justice is the subject of a new documentary that will have its Maine premier at the Lewiston Auburn Film Festival, April 14 at 10:45am: **Broken On All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration & New Visions for Criminal Justice in the U.S.** (brokenonallsides.com). The filmmaker, Matt Pillischer, will lead a panel discussion with members of M-PAC, Maine NAACP, and other criminal justice advocates after the movie. Pillischer will also be appearing on a filmmakers' panel on Sunday at the festival.

America made headlines worldwide a few years ago when we reached 1 in 100 adults behind bars. And the numbers become much worse when you look at minority communities: about 1 in 36 Latino adults and 1 in 15 African American adults. As Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, has pointed out, "There are more African Americans under correctional control today than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the civil war began. That's the scale of mass incarceration in the African American community today."

Michelle Alexander's theory, that mass incarceration is a new racial caste system in America, figures prominently in *Broken On All Sides*. "I started the movie looking at severe overcrowding in Philly's jails," says filmmaker/activist/attorney Pillischer, "and it has evolved into an indictment of systemic racism that occurs in the entire criminal justice system." Pillischer has been an activist for years and worked around issues of police brutality and racism in Cincinnati and Philadelphia. Before graduation from law school in 2010, he interned for a prominent civil rights law firm that was suing the Philadelphia Prison System for overcrowding conditions.

What will it take to change things? "We need to organize. The law can't solve it, the laws are part of the problem," says this young attorney, who has stopped practicing law to organize around the movie. "In order to really solve problems of crime and public safety, it requires a completely different approach to the problem. We've been pouring money into a law enforcement response— money that should go to jobs, education, treatment programs, resources for the communities, particularly communities of color that have always been targeted by criminal justice."

Broken On All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration & New Visions for Criminal Justice in the U.S.
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Pillischer worked as a new attorney at Community Legal Services where he helped Philadelphians experiencing employment problems due to their criminal records. He saw first-hand the effects of criminal records on people's lives.

It is discomfoting to examine the eerie similarities that exist between the Jim Crow era and today's era of mass incarceration when you look at the rights taken away due to felony convictions: jury rights, voting rights, access to public benefits and education, the possibility of getting a decent job and housing—all these things are affected. Add this: in some states 80-90% of all drug offenders sent to prison have been African American, while studies consistently show that people of color are no more likely to use or sell drugs than white Americans. In a different era, where laws are colorblind and a small number of African Americans have risen to the very top of the nation, the movie argues that the effects of “tough on crime” and drug war policies in African American communities are all too similar to Jim Crow.

Broken On All Sides explores the history of mass incarceration, how we got to where we are today, and proposes bold solutions to end mass incarceration. “It's going to take a social movement, like it's always taken in this country for great change,” says Pillischer. “It starts small. It starts with education, and organizing with what we have today. You never know when there will be an explosion of activism—just look at the rallies going on around Trayvon Martin today.”

Among the panel will be local Pulitzer-nominated writer and cultural analyst, Gladden Schrock, who described the movie as a “poignant present-tense call-to-arms...a subject no honest feeling citizen dare avoid.” The panel also features a prison activist from Maine and member of M-PAC, Ray Luc Levasseur, who spent 20 years in Federal prisons; and Rachel Talbot Ross, a leader of the Maine NAACP and member of M-PAC, and long-time civil rights and prisoners' rights advocate. A ticket for \$22 will get you into all of Saturday's movies. Full schedule and details on the festival are available at: <http://www.lafilmfestival.org/>

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