



For Immediate Release

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P.O.V.'s "Prison Town, USA" Explores Impact of Prison-building Boom On Heartland America, Tuesday, July 24 on PBS

Economic Pressures Drive Rural Towns Like Susanville, Calif., to Trade
Bucolic Past for 'Prison Industry' Future

*A co-production of the Independent Television Service (ITVS)
And KQED/Truly California*

*"A raw look at how a small town in Northern California is transformed when the locals
agree to the construction of a prison. . . . in every respect, this film is illuminating. . ."*
– Ashland Daily Tidings

What happens when a struggling rural community tries to revive its economy by inviting prisons in? The story of four families living in a modern-day prison town, as told in a new P.O.V. documentary, is a riveting look at one of the most striking phenomena of our times: a prison-building and incarceration boom unprecedented in American history.

Po Kutchins and Katie Galloway's **Prison Town, USA** has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, July 24, 2007** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 20th-anniversary season of public television's groundbreaking **P.O.V.** series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

The Tyler family was just passing through Susanville, Calif., when father Lonnie was arrested for shoplifting \$40 worth of groceries and diapers. Lonnie got a 16-month sentence, leaving Jen and the kids stranded in "prison town." Dawayne Brasher worked in Susanville's lumber mills for nearly 20 years until the last one closed in 2004. His only choices were to leave his hometown or seek work at the huge prison complexes that have sprung up in the area. Gabe Jones liked his job at Mike O'Kelly's Morning Glory Dairy, but the prospect of earning much more money as a prison guard finally proved irresistible — sending him off to guard academy. O'Kelly, a third-generation dairyman, finds his business endangered when the prisons threaten to abrogate their "good neighbor" buy-local policy.

Stories like these are increasingly common in rural America where, during the 1990s, a prison opened every 15 days. The United States now has the dubious distinction of incarcerating more people per capita than any other country in the world. Yet this

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astounding jailing of America has been little noted because many of the prisons have opened in remote areas like Susanville. **Prison Town, USA** examines one of the country's biggest prison towns, a place where a new correctional economy encompasses not only prisoners, guards and their families, but the whole community.

Nestled in the picturesque foothills of the California Sierras, Susanville once thrived on logging, ranching and agriculture. Even today, the town offers a postcard image of small-town America under majestic peaks — if you keep the prisons out of the frame. Susanville, along with much of rural America, has seen its local agricultural economy go the way of the family farm. And like other communities that don't want to become ghost towns, Susanville decided to take a chance on the only industry that came calling — California's burgeoning prison system, hungry for space, new guards and low visibility.

The town was promised jobs and a large institutional buyer for local services. Today the Susanville area hosts three prison complexes housing more than 11,000 inmates, with plans for more to come. The inmate population is nearly double the number of local residents.

Prison Town, USA follows the fortunes of Dawayne, Gabe, Mike, Lonnie and their families over the course of two years, weaving in a chorus of voices from other townspeople along the way. The resulting story is one of hard choices and unanticipated consequences. As Susanville's good-hearted country-boys-turned-prison-guards soon learn, life outside the walls is developing eerie parallels to life on the inside.

As locals are quick to point out, no one grows up dreaming of becoming a prison guard, but the high pay and benefits of corrections work, especially by rural standards, are irresistible. At correctional officer training academy, Dawayne and Gabe have to learn new skills and attitudes, often quite foreign to their upbringing. Besides the obvious dangers of the job, the constant tension spills into the guards' home lives, changing how they relate to their families and friends. In a sense they, too, are imprisoned — a reality that is hard to shake once they leave work. High rates of substance and domestic abuse are well-known hazards of the profession.

The correctional facilities also introduce new divisions in this once tight-knit community. Tensions arise between those who work for the prisons and those who don't, between locals and prisoners' family members and between prison employees and paroled inmates. That's where Lonnie and Jen's travails take a twist that must call into question the underpinnings of the prison boom itself. Sixteen months in prison for a \$40 larceny might seem excessive — and excessively expensive for the taxpayer. The cost is even higher for the struggling couple and their children — the kids not only lose their father, but are taken away from their temporarily homeless mother and put in foster care.

With the help of Crossroads Ministries, a local group that assists families of prisoners, Jen manages to recover the children and rent a small home to await Lonnie's release. Lonnie gets out on parole after nine months — but is forced to serve his parole in Susanville. Now he must somehow find work in a town where there are few jobs outside the prisons, while living under the strict scrutiny of his parole officer, where the smallest infraction can send him back to prison.

Meanwhile, Mike O'Kelly mounts a campaign to stop Prison Industries from forcing the prisons to cancel their contracts with Morning Glory Dairy, which relies on the account for more than a quarter of its business. The other local merchants, who face similar consequences from Prison Industries, are sympathetic. But the people of Susanville seem to have little power against the economic and political behemoth that the corrections industry has become in California. Mike is only able to win a reprieve, extending his contract through June 2007.

Prison Town, USA lays bare the economic and political dynamics behind the prison-building frenzy that is changing the landscape of rural America, shedding light on some of the little-understood human costs of the nation's criminal-justice policies.

“There are now over 7 million people incarcerated, on probation or parole in the United States,” says co-director Katie Galloway. “We hope this film will awaken people to the real consequences of prison expansion, particularly in rural areas that have been so important in forming the history and character of California and the country.”

“Across the country prisons are transforming our economy, psychology and culture,” says co-director Po Kutchins. “We hope our film promotes much-needed dialogue about the wisdom of America’s policies.”

Prison Town, USA is a co-production of KQED/Truly California, the Center for Independent Documentary and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

About the filmmakers:

Po Kutchins

Co-director/Co-producer

Emmy Award-winning producer/director Po Kutchins has worked in film and television for the past 12 years. She has produced, directed and edited documentary programs for HBO, National Geographic, Bravo, A&E and PBS, among others. Her work includes a feature documentary profiling a year in the life of a young man on death row; several hours following the group Doctors Without Borders on humanitarian operations in Africa, Asia and South America; and such acclaimed reality series as “Dog the Bounty Hunter” and “Family Plots.” She received an Emmy in 2000 for editing the award-winning HBO film “Come Unto Me,” which she also co-wrote. Kutchins is currently directing and producing a new documentary reality series “Parking Wars” for A&E.

Katie Galloway

Co-director/Co-producer

Katie Galloway has produced, directed and reported more than a dozen hours of documentary television for PBS’s *Frontline* series, California Public Television and CBS News. Her work received the Society of Professional Journalists’ Best Documentary prize for the program “GunShots” (2001); a national Emmy nomination for Public and Community Service (also for “GunShots”) and a national Emmy nomination in the investigative documentary category for the *Frontline* documentary “The Case for Innocence.” Galloway has taught at Columbia University’s School of Journalism and currently teaches at U.C. Berkeley.

Credits:

Co-directors/co-producers:	Po Kutchins, Katie Galloway
Field Producer/Senior Researcher:	Shareen der Parthogh
Field Producer:	Daniella Brower
Cinematography:	Evan Eames
Editor:	Beth K. Segal

Running Time: 86:46

Festivals:

- Ashland Independent Film Festival, Ashland, Ore., 2007 – *Finalist, Jury Award*
- Los Angeles Film Festival, 2007
- Palm Beach International Film Festival, Palm Beach, Calif., 2007 – Official Selection
- Breck Film Festival, Breckenridge, Colo. – Official Selection
- Hoboken International Film Festival, Hoboken, N.J., 2007 – Official Selection



ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the PBS series *Independent Lens*. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences.

Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. For more information, please visit www.itvs.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and celebrating its 20th season on PBS in 2007, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought more than 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces special features for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video, and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. P.O.V. Interactive produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses *Talking Back*, where viewers can comment on P.O.V. programs, engage in dialogue and link to further resources. The P.O.V. Web site and P.O.V. archives, including special sites from previous broadcasts, form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these original materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences. P.O.V. works closely with local PBS stations to partner with museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. P.O.V.'s *Youth Views* expands these efforts by working with youth-service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, the Educational Foundation of America, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, with additional support from JPMorgan Chase Foundation, the official sponsor of P.O.V.'s 20th Anniversary Campaign. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.