1. THE PRISON BOOM

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TO DAY'S

2003 1970

280,000 prisoners 2.1 million prisoners

BOOM THE TOTAL U.S. IMPRISONMENT BUDGET = \$55 billion

PRISON BOOM: A prison boom is a period of growth, of ususual prison expansion.

It is when the number of prisoners and prisons within a prison system grows far more than normal, so that the system itself increases in size.

While the number of prisoners goes up and down day by day, a prison boom typically follows large changes within society, N shifts in wealth & poverty, wide ranging changes to laws, rights and citizenship. Then:

- More people are imprisoned,
- More prisons are built;
- New officials are given budgets and staff;
- More prison workers are hired and unionized:
- More and more careers rely upon a GROWING PRISON ECONOMY, and the larger society becomes more dependent on prisons as the solution to any and all problems.

Usually, such expansion remains permanent, slowing or reversing only when the system comes into crisis. Including economic, political and social crisis, the prisons close and the system shrinks only when it runs out of resources and/or faces popular dissent.

CORRECTIONS begins by introducing the current US Prison Boom. As we write this in 2003, the US is in the midst of a 30 year prison boom, with 770% more prisoners than it had in 1970. Because of this boom, the U.S. now has the largest prison system in the world, locking away a higher percentage of its population than any other country. No society in the history of civilization has ever had a prison system of such a size and character as the USA does today.

> The US has 5,033 Prisons & Jails China has 698, Russia has 1,000, Canada has 221, Western Europe as a whole has 1,544.

WHY THIS PRISON BOOM? **HOW DOES IT EFFECTS US?**

"There was the story of a prisoner who asked a warden if he could write a letter to his father, who was also in the prison system. He also asked the warden if he could write to his grandfather, who was also in the prison system. So three generations of the same family in the same prison system..."



MICHAEL MAHONEY

This quotation from CORRECTIONS addresses a prison system that is affecting multiple generations of families, and helps us interpret statistics you see on these pages into *human terms*, connected not to numbers but to what it means for generations of citizens, families and communities.

Many people try to explain what today's prison growth is about. Politicians, law enforcement, the media, and probably most of the people you know, explain this prison growth only in terms of protecting 'our safety' against seemingly endless, growing threats. But as more people are locked up each day, including our family members, neighbors, co-workers or even ourselves, we begin to wonder who are the ones being protected? Are the "threats" they speak of ourselves?

Despite the Prison Boom, many of our communities are still not any more safe. The things that do make our communities safe, like *good jobs*. nurturing schools, good and affordable health care, and resources for those in need, seem to disappear more and more each day. On our streets and in our

Crime rates rose in the 1970s, but the Prison Boom began its most serious growth AFTER they started to go back down; and while crime rates have continued to decline since then, the prison system continued to grow, it DOUBLED in the 1980s, and DOUBLED again in the 90s.

homes, the constant presence of police and state agencies tends to make us less safe. while the steady disappearance of young people, fathers and mothers into prisons undermines our strength and stability.

In this way, just a little bit of research reveals that much more is driving this Prison Boom than a simple, objective response to levels of crime that are random, unexplainable, or about 'bad people' who just 'need to be locked up' in order to protect our safety.

CORRECTIONS looks at the Prison Boom from a different angle altogether — not from the issue of 'public safety,' but from what really drives and divides so much of our larger society: politics and economics, race and class, and poverty versus incredible wealth and greed. CORRECTIONS doesn't bring you the images of prisons we're used to seeing on TV and in the movies, or in most prison documentaries; there are no action scenes or images you're supposed to 'enjoy' watching. We've even made the choice not to show you any prisoners, because CORRECTIONS is not about prisoners, but rather, about the 'construction' of prisonsers:

> The politics of how people are made into prisoners.

MORE NUMBERS:

Beyond the 2.1 million actually locked in prisons & iails, over **6.6 million** are actually under some type of Correctional supervision, including probation, parole, home monitoring, etc;

One out of every 134 people in the U.S. are in prison;

f we assume that each of these people has 3 family members, that makes 195 million people who are directly affected by the Prison Boom.

TAXES:

U.S. citizens pay an average of more than \$500 per year in taxes for police, courts, prisons and jails, parole and probation;

Add what taxpayers pay for the criminal justice system to what they pay for alarms and home security measures, private security, replacement of stolen property, or repair harm to victims, and you get an average of over \$4000 a year.

RATES & PERCENTAGES

While the U.S. has less than 5 % of the World's Population, it has **25**% of its Prison Population;

U.S. Rate of Incarceration: 700 per every 100,000 **US** Citizens are imprisoned.

European Incarceration Rates average less than 100 per 100,000 Citizens.

This introduction poses the questions that the rest of the film will explore:

- How has this Prison Boom occured?
- Who does it benefit?
- What are the 'official explanations' for it, and what do we know differently from our own experiences and in our communities?
- What can today's Prison Boom teach us about prisons in general?
- What else can we learn about society, about history and about life today from looking at our society's prisons?

OUR METHOD: BRINGING IN 'PROFIT'

The main issue we use to approach these questions is the issue of *profit*. Profit is defined in different ways: first, in terms of *making money*; but also, 'profit' can be used to explain gaining any kind of benefit — greater access to things or privilege in life, or gaining the upper hand on someone else. Beyond money, gaining *power* and *influence* can be considered forms of 'profit.'

In researching for CORRECTIONS, we encountered many claims that the Prison Boom is simply prison growth in order for 'good' to fight against 'evil.' But when we looked further, this idea of "good versus evil" existed only in *images and words:* in the *movies*, on *TV shows, the nightly news*, and in the *speeches of politicians*, but not in the daily lives of people. When we looked behind these images and words, what we saw were epidemic conditions of *neglect, abuse, poverty, varying forms of racism, sexism, ignorance* and *inequality.*

At the same time, facilitating the Boom and the chance to capitalize from it were directly in the insterest of the people who run the prison system, who support it and profit from it in so many ways. It was there, within those varied levels profit—making, mixed in with the histories of poverty, racism, sexism that we found the the real forces and fuel behind the Prison Boom.

OUR PROTAGONIST: PRIVATE PRISONS / PRISON PRIVATIZATION

But how can prisons be about profit, when most of us think of prisons as an 'expense': where money and lives are are poured into a system we know little of, and get little out of in return? It's a complicated matter, but within that system of imprisonment and within the world of politics, we found a vast network of businesses, professionals and politicians for whom prisons and imprisonment were a source of their livelihood, opportunity and wealth.

Although the profit from prisons does not come in one particular form, the most obvious example of this profit lie clearly in the story of **Private Prisons**, the prisons that are now *owned and run* by commercial corporations, paid for by the money of tax payers, strictly for the profit of the businesses.

A PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: DIFFERENT KINDS OF 'PROFIT'

Private Prisons are economic-political entities that profit directly if the numbers of prisoners grow within the country (and within the world), and loose money if the numbers of prisoners go down. But they are not at the center of the Prison Boom, it's much more complex than that. But they are our most concrete example — a metaphor for the whole system and its relation to the broader society.

The term most people use is a **"Prison Industrial Complex,"** which isn't just about the 'money making' kind of profit. It is more about the 'complex' process where all these interests come together, as an *industry* — as a *political interest and political power*, and a *means for maintaining the social order of society, preserving and reproducing its economic, racial and gender based hierarchies.*

FINANCIAL PROFIT

POLITICAL PROFIT

PROFIT FROM POWER, PRIVILEGE AND HIERARCHY, AT THE EXPENSE OF A GROWING NUMBER OF PEOPLE

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