[Host Organization Name/Logo] For Immediate Release

[Contact Person/Phone/Email] [Date]

Press Materials: <http://pppdocs.com/firstdegree.html>

**[Host Organization(s)] host(s) special screening of FIRST DEGREE, a new film about a college behind bars that prevents released inmates from returning to prison, followed by a panel discussion with [if any prominent speakers] at [location/date/time]**

The expression “sent up the river” was coined by individuals who were sent up the Hudson River to do their time at the infamous Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. FIRST DEGREE finds hope in this seemingly hopeless place by exploring an unusual prison education program that appears to keep Sing Sing inmates from being sent back up the river after their release. Nationwide, over half of released inmates return to prison within five years, but for the past 14 years, less than 1% of the inmates who earned their college degrees at Sing Sing returned to prison.

[Organization(s) name(s)] will host a screening of FIRST DEGREE, followed by a panel discussion with [any prominent speakers] at [location] on [date/time] to [any specific, brief purpose].

[Quote from event host about prison education and criminal justice reform]

[Brief descriptions of host organizations]

[More about the event, key speakers, any timely local news hooks, and participating partner organizations and their involvement with prison education and criminal justice reform]

“After completing a recent documentary about capital punishment, I wanted to address another timely criminal justice issue—mass incarceration. America has 5% of the world’s population but 25% of the world’s prisoners,” says director Roger Weisberg. “Since launching the war on drugs in the 1970s, there has been a 700% increase in our prison population. The land of the free is now the world’s biggest jailer with almost seven million Americans in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole. If our prisons were effectively rehabilitating inmates and making our communities safer, it might be possible to justify the 80 billion dollars a year we spend on mass incarceration, but our prisons do an abysmal job of preparing inmates for productive lives once they return to their communities. Over three quarters of released inmates are re-arrested within five years, and over half return to prison.”

Weisberg says, “Nationwide, every dollar we spend on prison education programs saves five dollars on re-incarceration costs. But, when Congress withdrew prison education funding in 1994, the number of prison college programs dropped from 350 to about a dozen. My hope is that FIRST DEGREEcan make a wary public realize that prison education saves money as well as lives.”

FIRST DEGREE is the 32nd documentary produced and directed by Roger Weisberg for national public television. His previous films have won over a hundred and fifty awards including Emmy, duPont-Columbia, and Peabody awards, as well as two Academy Award nominations. FIRST DEGREE builds on this extensive body of work andrepresents the culmination of nearly four decades of reporting on ways to remove barriers and expand opportunities for disadvantaged Americans.

FIRST DEGREE is a production of Public Policy Productions, Inc., in association with Thirteen/WNET New York; produced and directed by Roger Weisberg; written by John Fugelsang and Roger Weisberg; edited by Pascal Akesson; cinematography by John Hazard; sound by Jason Gillet and Mark Roy; additional field production by Jeff Seelbach; music composed by Richard Fiocca; design and animation by Bill Bergeron and Kristin Black; production management by Suzanne Beffa; for WNET, Executive-in-Charge is Stephen Segaller.

Major funding was provided by The JPB Foundation. Additional support was provided by Arlene and Alan Alda, Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund, Charles A. Frueauff Foundation, Odyssey Fund, Park Foundation, Silverweed Foundation, and the Spunk Fund, Inc.

Festival awards include the *Golden Reel Award, Best Short*, Tiburon International Film Festival, Tiburon, CA, April 2015; *Gold Remi Award, Social/Economic Issues*, Worldfest-Houston, Houston, TX, April 2015; *Best Documentary Short*, Ojai Film Festival, Ojai, CA, November 2015; and *Best Documentary Short*, Sedona International Film Festival, Sedona, AZ, February 2016.

FIRST DEGREE was an official selection at the following film festivals:

Tiburon International Film Festival, Tiburon, CA, *April 2015*, **Golden Reel Award, Best Short**

Worldfest-Houston, Houston, TX, *April 2015*, **Gold Remi Award, Social/Economic Issues**

Pittsburgh Independent Film Festival, Pittsburgh, PA, *June 2015*

Philadelphia International Film Festival, Philadelphia, PA, *June 2015*

Indy Film Fest, Indianapolis, IN, *July 2015*

Harlem International Film Festival, New York, NY, *September 2015*

Wine Country Film Festival*,* Sonoma, CA *September 2015*

New York City Independent Film Festival, New York, NY, *October 2015*

Ojai Film Festival, Ojai, CA *November 2015*, **Best Documentary Short**

East Lansing Film Festival, East Lansing, MI, *November 2015*

HollyShorts Film Festival Monthly, Los Angeles, CA, *2016*

Sedona International Film Festival, Sedona, AZ, *February 2016*, **Best Documentary Short**

Kansas City FilmFest, Kansas City, MO, *April 2016*

For further information about FIRST DEGREE, please visit the website at <http://pppdocs.com/firstdegree.html> or email us at [pppinfo@pppdocs.com](mailto:pppinfo@pppdocs.com).

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