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Contact: Xackery Irving
917-570-6800
xackery@hotmail.com chaingangpictures.com

Filmmaker's Controversial Chain Gang Documentary Available on DVD

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Xackery Irving's controversial 1999 documentary American Chain Gang is being released Tuesday, November 22, 2005 on DVD worldwide through *Amazon*, *Blockbuster.com*, *target.com* and *Netflix* and others.

Irving's film examines the lives of inmates and officers of the revived chain gang forced labor prison programs in Alabama and the world's first female chain gang in Arizona. The documentary follows the prisoners before, during and after their release from the chain gang examining the long term impact of these intense and highly controversial programs.

Making the film and finding distribution proved to quite challenging for the filmmaker. Xackery shot, produced, directed the film. It took four years to complete and was funded mostly by the filmmaker's credit cards. During the filming in Alabama, he and his crew were threatened by some 'camera shy inmates,' and as Irving shares "at one time we found ourselves alone with a few of the hostile inmates and no officers in sight." They managed to negotiate their way through misunderstandings, depleted production funds and a saturated documentary market.

In 1999, the film was completed and released in festival around the world. The film competed as a finalist in such festivals as the Human Rights Watch (New York), Nantucket, South by Southwest (Austin, TX), Atlanta, Noosa (Australia), New Orleans, and the Sedona Film Festivals. Winner of the Townsend Film Award, American Chain Gang found distribution in Europe, Canada and Mexico, but no takers in the US. "We had many meetings with *HBO*, *Court TV* and others to air the film, but they ultimately passed," Irving shares, "we spoke to a few video distributors, but without a TV deal, they weren't willing to put the resources behind a major release."

Just five months ago, while pre-producing his first narrative film Nothing Without You, a producing partner put Xackery in touch with *Cinema Libre Studios*, a television and film distributor behind the grass roots release of 2004's OutFoxed. *Cinema Libre* seemed a good match for the film as they were expanding their roster of political and social interest films. On Tuesday, November 29, American Chain Gang will finally be available to American audiences. "Since the issue of prison reform is so important, I hope the film will raise questions among those that see it," Irving says, "the prison population continues to grow. Much focus is given to the issue of punishment, but little to rehabilitation. I hope films like ours show the true impact that measures like chain gang labor have on the inmates they are intended to reform."

Xackery re-cut the film in 2005 to update the stories. One of the inmates feature in the film was recently murdered and one of the states that had chain gangs had since buckled to outside pressures and terminated their forced labor program.

Xackery works in New York as a freelance producer. He was produced and shot over sixty hours of documentary television on shows such as the Emmy Award Winning Trauma: Life in the ER (airing on *Discovery Health Channel* and *TLC*), The First 48 (airing on Thursday and Sunday nights on *A&E*), Paramedics (airing on *Discovery Health Channel*), and the upcoming Dallas SWAT (premiering January 5 on *A&E*)

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