From the 1930s to the 1960s, state and federal prisons across the U.S. allocated funds to publish newspapers and magazines for an imprisoned readership in monthly or weekly installments. Hundreds of imprisoned journalists organized under a loosely associated network called the Penal Press, and traded their publications by mail to institutions across the continent. This talk examines the visual strategies used by imprisoned journalists to advertise upcoming movie and television screenings at their respective prisons, and to generally promote spectatorship under states of confinement. Through the archive of the Penal Press, we learn that imprisoned spectators possessed shrewd evaluations of the moving images presented to them, and used these screenings as occasions to critique the institutional settings in which they lived.

The Anne Friedberg Memorial Lecture is given by a graduate student whose work exemplifies the spirit of interdisciplinary advocated in the life and scholarship of the late professor Anne Friedberg. Joshua Mitchell conducted part of his research as recipient of an Anne Friedberg short-term research award administered by VSRI.