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The Prison Empire

Texas stands out

A few excerpts from *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire*:

"America is 'the land of the free,' yet by one vital measure, it is less free than any other country on earth: it incarcerates a greater portion of its citizenry than any other, about 1 out of every 100 adults. With some 2.4 million persons under lock and key, the United States manages the largest penal system in the world, the grandest ever conceived by a democratic government."

"A half century ago – before the Montgomery bus boycott, before the War on Poverty, and before the conservative reaction against the social experimentation of the 1960s – blacks in the United States were imprisoned at roughly four times the rate of whites. Today, a generation after the triumphs of the civil rights movement, African Americans are incarcerated at seven times the rate of whites, nearly double the disparity measured before desegregation."

"Texas's plantations are 'probably the best example of slavery remaining in the country,' reported a national corrections expert in 1978. Twenty years later, when I first started visiting southern prisons, I reached the same conclusion."

"[J]ust as New York dominates finance and California the film industry, Texas reigns supreme in the punishment business. ... By almost any measure, Texas stands out. The state's per capita imprisonment rate (691 per 100,000 residents) is second only to Louisiana's and three times higher than the Islamic Republic of Iran's. Although Texas ranks fiftieth among states in the amount of money it spends on indigent criminal defense, it ranks first in prison growth, first in for-profit imprisonment, first in supermax lockdown, first in total number of adults under criminal justice supervision, and a resounding first in executions. When it comes to imprisonment, writes Joseph Hallinan, a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, Texas is 'where it's happening.'"

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