



Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire

Robert Perkinson

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A vivid history of America's biggest, baddest prison system and how it came to lead the nation's punitive revolution

In the prison business, all roads lead to Texas. The most locked-down state in the nation has led the way in criminal justice severity, from assembly-line executions to isolation supermaxes, from prison privatization to sentencing juveniles as adults. *Texas Tough*, a sweeping history of American imprisonment from the days of slavery to the present, shows how a plantation-based penal system once dismissed as barbaric became the national template.

Drawing on convict accounts, official records, and interviews with prisoners, guards, and lawmakers, historian Robert Perkinson reveals the Southern roots of our present-day prison colossus. While conventional histories emphasize the North's rehabilitative approach, he shows how the retributive and profit-driven regime of the South ultimately triumphed. Most provocatively, he argues that just as convict leasing and segregation emerged in response to Reconstruction, so today's mass incarceration, with its vast racial disparities, must be seen as a backlash against civil rights.

Illuminating for the first time the origins of America's prison juggernaut, *Texas Tough* points toward a more just and humane future.



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