



# Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire

By Robert Perkinson

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**Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire** By Robert Perkinson

**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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## **Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire By Robert Perkinson Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

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Although the American prison system is based (somewhat) on the principle of rehabilitation, it still retains, Perkinson says, powerful elements of one of its original influences: retribution. By way of explanation, he examines the country's harshest, largest penal system, that of Texas, the state that reigns supreme in the punishment business. (In one city, Huntsville, almost half its population is in prison and another fifth works in jobs related to keeping them there.) Perkinson explores the history of the state and its penal system, showing how retribution, at least as much as rehabilitation, played a key role in the system's evolution; and, by extension, he sheds light on the evolution of penal systems across the country. The American penal system, he argues, is very much a product of its southern influences (and, as a sure-to-be-controversial corollary to that, the racial imbalance of its prisoners is a kind of backlash against the civil rights movement). A fascinating and often deeply troubling book. --David Pitt

Review

### Winner of the 2011 PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award

"A searching history of American incarceration, and an important reckoning with our societal responsibility... An alarming indictment, built on passionate and exhaustive research."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Compelling... A gripping history lesson and a fascinating read."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Perkinson makes a convincing case that mass incarceration is the most pressing civil rights issue today... Essential reading if the nation ever hopes to move in a different, less-punitive and more-rehabilitative direction."

—*The Boston Globe*

"Takes readers on an eminently horrifying journey into America's own heart of darkness."

—*Columbia Journalism Review*

"A well-researched and compellingly-written genealogy of the contemporary model of retributive justice... Brings out the horrors of mass imprisonment and the need for systemic change."

—*The Independent*

"A rich narrative... Perkinson directs the clear light of reason onto the Lone Star State."

—*The Morning News*

"An intensively researched, disturbing history of American penology... A convincing and discouraging argument that the Texas model of a profit-making, retributive prison system has become the national template."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Sheds light on the evolution of penal systems across the country... A fascinating and often deeply troubling

book.”

—*Booklist*

“*Texas Tough* is a raw, compelling assessment of racial disparity and southern culture as they have determined the massive over-incarceration of African Americans. If you want to understand how politics, not crime control, governs today’s prison population, read this book. Anyone concerned with justice and fairness should place this on their must-read list.”

—Charles J. Ogletree Jr., Jesse Climenko Professor of Law, Harvard Law School, and author of *When Law Fails*

“This book is a Texas Death Match between David (Robert Perkinson) and Goliath (the American prison system). Goliath is armed, violent, massive, and hard to bring down, but David has a sling and a book full of smooth stones taken from the brook of history.”

—Marcus Rediker, author of *The Slave Ship: A Human History*

“*Texas Tough* is a powerful study of the Texas prison system, its profit-driven administration, its history and its critical impact on the U.S. national prison system. Based on superb research that traces the racial assumptions of today’s criminal system to the ideas of race developed during American slavery, *Texas Tough* is a gracefully written work of wide-ranging, impressive historical knowledge.”

—James Oliver Horton, author of *Landmarks of African American History*

“A brilliant and riveting account of the nation's most important prison system. Perkinson describes its growth with extraordinary care given to the daily lives of the inmates, the institutional structures, and the philosophy of punishment (including the death penalty) that seem immune to innovation and reform. Texas provides a perfect lens to study America's exploding prison problems today, and Perkinson in an ideal guide. As both an original history of punishment and a critique of current issues of race, violence, and incarceration, *Texas Tough* is in a class by itself.”

—David Oshinsky, author of “*Worse Than Slavery*”: *Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice*

“The United States maintains the largest penal system in the world. With his powerful story of the prisons of Texas, Robert Perkinson shows how we came to this desperate condition. It is a story we all need to understand and there is no better place to comprehend the origins and evolution of this national tragedy.”

—Edward Ayers, author of *The Promise of the New South*

“*Texas Tough* is a gripping work of history, but its most important lesson is about the country we live in today. We cannot fulfill America’s promise of liberty and justice until we address the crisis of mass incarceration. Every social justice advocate and policy maker in the nation needs to read this book.”

—Ann Beeson, Executive Director, Open Society Institute

“*Texas Tough* is the most important history of crime and punishment in America since David Rothman’s *The Discovery of the Asylum*. It will transform our understanding of not only crime and punishment but also the nature of historical change in the United States, which is not driven, as we believe, by progress or even the idea of progress, but by regress. Robert Perkinson shows us that the past continuously structures and constrains every effort to re-imagine and reform the present. This is no small achievement.”

—Corey Robin, author of *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*

“*Texas Tough* shows that the politics of race has always governed the politics of punishment and explains why our criminal justice system is the frontline of America’s human rights struggle in the twenty-first century. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to build a stronger America and put these decades of

over-incarceration (and under-education) of Americans behind us.”

—Benjamin Todd Jealous, President, NAACP

#### About the Author

**Robert Perkinson** is a professor of American studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His writing has appeared in *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, and *Boston Review*, among other venues. *Texas Tough* is his first book. He lives in Honolulu, Hawaii.

#### Users Review

##### From reader reviews:

##### Mary Gines:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite book and reading a guide. Beside you can solve your problem; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire*. Try to stumble through book *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire* as your buddy. It means that it can to get your friend when you experience alone and beside associated with course make you smarter than before. Yeah, it is very fortunated to suit your needs. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know anything by the book. So , let me make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

##### Emily Walker:

People live in this new day of lifestyle always attempt to and must have the extra time or they will get wide range of stress from both everyday life and work. So , if we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not a robot. Then we request again, what kind of activity are there when the spare time coming to you actually of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative in spending your spare time, often the book you have read is *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire*.

##### Erin Weiss:

With this era which is the greater individual or who has ability to do something more are more special than other. Do you want to become among it? It is just simple strategy to have that. What you have to do is just spending your time not much but quite enough to enjoy a look at some books. Among the books in the top record in your reading list is *Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire*. This book which is qualified as *The Hungry Slopes* can get you closer in growing to be precious person. By looking upward and review this e-book you can get many advantages.

##### Douglas Gibson:

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know that little person like reading or as studying become their hobby. You need to know that reading is very important and also book as to be the point. Book is important thing to provide you knowledge, except your personal teacher or lecturer. You will find good news or update regarding something by book. Numerous books that can you decide to try be your object. One of them is Texas Tough: The Rise of America's Prison Empire.

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