The Texas Prison Rodeo: A Failure of a Broken System

Lee Shaw

© 2017 Lee Shaw

Started in 1932 by former Texas Prison System general manager, Lee Simmons, the Texas Prison Rodeo in Huntsville, Texas, stood as a pillar of Southern traditions and community engagement until its closure in 1987. People came from all over the country to witness the unique spectacle of murderers and thieves among a variety of prisoners competing in the most dangerous sport in the United States. Praised for the excessive danger of its events, the special guest performers who graced the stage between rides, and the general demeanor of the convict participants; the rodeo grossed more than two-hundred thousand dollars over the course of four weekend performances each year. The directors of the Texas Prison System would claim that all of these funds were dedicated to inmate education, medical care, and religious conversion, which would thus satiate the desires of prison reformers for decades, accordingly allowing the Texas Prison system to stew in its inefficiency, largely unopposed. Despite the near-universal praise the Texas Prison Rodeo would receive over its fifty-five years of operation, the deeper truth of the Texas Prison Rodeo is characterized by failed and distant prison administrations, racialized labor, maltreatment of prisoners, and the profiling of rural, low-income communities – a pattern which has plagued the Texas Prison System from its creation and persists even today. This article presents the Texas Prison Rodeo as a poignant example of the endemic failure of the Texas Prison System in order to express the necessity of radical reform of a state prison system which has yet to be effective over the course of almost two-hundred years of operation.

Literature Review

The body of research documenting the failures of the Texas Prison System is ever-expanding. For instance, in their article, “Narrative of Neglect: Texas Prisons for Men,” Keith Price and Susan Coleman offer a detailed overview of the entire history of the Texas prison system, specifically highlighting the injustices that Texas prisoners have faced and the administrative shortcomings that caused this suffering. Price and Coleman’s article shows that the Texas prison system was very much racialized, and has been argued by prison reformers to be a legal continuation of slave and sharecropping labor. The authors also explore the reasons behind the explosions of inmate populations in Texas and how the state responded to these increases. This text offers extensive insight into the utilization of prisons by the Texas State Government as money-making enterprises since the founding of the first state prison in Huntsville, Texas in 1848, many years after Texas became an independent republic. As such, from the very beginning of the Texas Prison System, the Texas State Government presented a lacking care for rehabilitative justice and the proper facilities to contain and reeducate Texan criminals. It is this theme of disrespect and mismanagement which this work seeks to address in the modern Texas Prison system.

In his article, “A Missed Opportunity: Texas Prison Reform during the Dan Moody Administration” Paul M. Lucko explores the failed prison reforms of the Texas administration which ended in 1931, the year before the Texas Prison Rodeo was established. Lucko details the many movements which attempted to bring about prison reform in Texas, such as the Texas Prisoners’ Protective Association, the Texas Prison Association, and the Texas Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor (CPPL). The CPPL conducted a survey of Texas State Prisons in 1924, finding that all institutions faced a serious lack of medial, especially psychiatric, care and further discovered that the prisoners were often maltreated through forced labor. These organizations proposed many plans for reforming the Texas Prison System, but all were ultimately rejected by Texas Legislators. The following constant resignations of one prison director after another are suggestive of the disarray experienced by the Texas Prison System and the reflection of such on those incarcerated within the system. Specifically, as the CPPL considered relocating the entirety of the prison situated in Huntsville to outside of Austin, riots threatened to break out in Texas prisons due to overcrowding and mistreatment – a testament to the lack of needed reform in the Texas Prison System. As such, Lucko establishes the tenuous position of the Texas Prison System, thwarting administration after administration in its reformation, which would then affect the Texas Prison Rodeo.

Furthermore, in his book, *Doing Time in the Depression: Everyday Life in Texas and California Prisons*, Ethan Blue discusses the bloodsport and racialized tensions present within the Texas Prison Rodeo. Blue details the inherent and extreme danger to inmates participating in the rodeo and how this danger generated such massive interest in the rodeo. Moreover, Blue notes how crowds adored and exalted repeatedly successful prisoners within the rodeo, which further encouraged inmates to participate in the dangerous events therein. Although there were only several recorded deaths that occurred within the Texas Prison Rodeo, serious injuries were common, ranging anywhere from broken bones to being gored or stomped by bulls. However, Blue notes that not many black inmates were allowed to directly participate in the rodeo events. More often than not, black inmates were relegated to much smaller but equally dangerous roles in the rodeo, such as clowns and stable boys. The sheer number of injuries would result from the general lack of experience shared among participating inmates as well as the extreme danger of the events and hand-selected livestock. Blue’s depiction of the Texas Prison Rodeo offers an insightful understanding as to why the Texas Prison Rodeo lasted as long as it did, despite its maltreatment of Texas prisoners. While Texas prisoners were paid to participate, despite their injuries, the crowds were satiated by the violence and spectacle of the show that could be matched by no other rodeo. Moreover, the audience members could feel good about their attendance as their entrance fees supposedly went towards funding the medical and educational needs of Texas State Prisons. The truth, however, is that the Texas Prison Rodeo, despite its decades of operation and accumulated acclaim, harmed prisoners more than it helped them at the gain of the state.

The Early History of the Texas State Penal System

The failure of the Texas Prison System was foreshadowed by the lack of emphasis on prison facilities in the initial creation of the Republic of Texas. For instance, the first prison built in Texas, the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas, also called “The Walls,” was constructed in 1849, four years after the former republic became a state and thirteen years after the initial foundation of the Republic in 1836 (Price 47). Therefore, Texas did not have a single penitentiary within its borders for the first thirteen years of its existence as a governing body. Such begs the question of how, then, the state of Texas dealt with criminal offences. Preceding the constructing of its first penitentiaries, Texas had no means of holding and rehabilitating criminal offenders. In the 1820s, Texas was very sparsely populated, which made the establishment of local authority figures and institutions especially difficult – thus, crime ran largely unopposed. When criminals were apprehended, however, the punishment was swift, brutal, and unapologetic. More often than not, offenders were hung for more grievous offences such as murder, while theft and assault would often earn an offender an extensive public whipping (Price 45-46). The situation did not improve by much, however, even after prisons appeared on the Texas landscape.

Early Texas prisons placed extreme importance on containing criminals without taking up too much state funding. For instance, when Texas State legislators approved funding for the first state prison in Huntsville, they stated, “The new prison would be a place where inmates would be forced to abide by strict rules of behavior and discipline and would work so as to not be a burden on the state’s taxpayers” (Price 46). As such, from the very beginning of the Texas State Prison System, the prisons contained therein were expected to become self-sustaining institutions, whereby those incarcerated would provide for their forced stay through strenuous labor. Yet it soon became clear that such a vision was idealistic at best, as the Committee on Prisons and Prison Labor, or CPPL, conducted a survey in 1923 which found that Texas prisons lacked proper medical facilities, educational facilities, enforced cruel corporal punishments, and subjected them to unsafe working conditions (Lucko 33-34). Moreover, although Texas prisons were agricultural centers surrounded by farmlands which prisoners were forced to work, the low-lying areas surrounding “The Walls” at Huntsville were subject to frequent flooding, poor soil, and especially tough weeds. Therefore, prisoners could not squeeze out a profit for such prisons, which resulted in low pay for prison personnel, who often took bribes and stole from the prisons they staffed in order to make up for their losses (Lucko 35-36). As such, although reformers would argue that Texas prisons should be moved to more fertile farmland, the staggering cost of such a move grounded these proposals. The prisoners themselves were equally hopeless, as a parole board in Texas was not established until 1929, and even then the number of inmates who would receive parole was slim at best, with Governors such as Pat M. Neff approving two-hundred-and-fifty paroles over four years, thus securing more workers for prison farms (Lucko 46). The price of maintaining these prisons became the central issue for the Texas Department of Corrections, as Texas was the only state in the Union in 1932 which did not provide state funding for the medical and educational needs of prison inmates (Coffield). It would be this desperate need for funding which would spur the creation of the Texas Prison Rodeo.

The Foundation of the Texas Prison Rodeo

The Texas Prison Rodeo was founded in 1932 by former general manager, Lee Simmons. In its beginning, the prison rodeo was held in an empty field just outside of “The Walls” at Huntsville. The inmates who participated received no training whatsoever and utilized a minimal amount of proper equipment, such as saddles, fencing, etc. The event drew a small crowd of Huntsville townsfolk in its first year, but with each passing year the crowds grew by the hundreds and then thousands, attracting people from other towns and cities. In 1937, prison officials utilized prison labor to construct wooden stands and charged a flat fifty cent entrance fee. These stands were extended over time to seat around four-thousand people. The demand for the rodeo so grew, however, that the specially designated Rodeo Committee of the Texas Prison Board decided to fund the replacement of the wooden stands with a true brick and concrete stadium, which, at its completion in 1950, sat 22,500 people, not including the special inmates section and select temporary seating. After the construction of this new stadium, ticket prices became much higher; $4.95 for box seats, $4.40 for seats in the center of the stadium and those that faced away from the sun, $3.75 for ground level seats, and $2.40 for the relative nosebleed sections (“It’s a knockout”). Such a price for one person was by no means cheap, however, as one must consider that the price of a loaf of bread in the late fifties rested somewhere around twenty-two cents. The rodeo became so popular that major hotel chains began sprouting up in Huntsville, advertising special rates for the month of October (“Come Early, Stay Late”). The rodeo would occur every Sunday in October and, at its height in the late fifties, the Texas Prison Rodeo would welcome around one-hundred-thousand attendees and gross over two-hundred-thousand dollars over the course of those four days. According to the Texas Prison Board, these profits were dedicated to filling the void in prisoner care which the state government would not fund. As such, advertisements for the Texas Prison Rodeo claimed that all profits would go towards providing “spiritual guidance, dental care, education, recreation, medical care, eye care, and vocational training” to Texas prisoners (“You and Your Rodeo Dollar”). As such, people of all walks of life came from Texas and beyond to see a spectacle like no other. Moreover, attending individuals believed their hard-earned entrance fee dollars were going to a good cause: the reformation of convict souls. As shown through the immense violence and danger of the events performed by largely unexperienced inmates, however, it is clear that the Prison Board was not concerned with the rehabilitation of such individuals, but rather, the profits they wrought.

Events, Performances, and Praise

The Texas Prison Rodeo was branded with taglines such as “the meanest rodeo in Texas,” “the world’s wildest rodeo,” “the world’s roughest rodeo,” and “the rodeo capital of the underworld,” none of which overstep the truth. Inmates participating in the prison rodeo were simply willing, perhaps because they were desperate, to compete in acts so dangerous that they did not even occur in professional rodeos (“World’s Roughest Rodeo”). For instance, one of the most popular events at the Texas Prison Rodeo was the “Mad Scramble,” wherein ten riders entered the stadium at the same time, all riding bucking Brahmin bulls. Most professional rodeos never allowed more than one bucking bull in the arena at a time, however, due to the extreme danger contained by just a single Brahmin bull (*The Echo* ’62). As such, the Texas Prison Rodeo became a truly unique place, where rodeo fans could see events that would simply occur nowhere else. Another such event was the “Wild Horse Race” where fifty convicts, in teams of ten, would compete to wrangle ten wild stallions and then ride these stallions over a designated finish line. According to the association of Professional Wild Horse Racing, the wild horse race should be enacted by a team of three men with no more than six teams (“Wild Horse Race History). As such, the Texas Prison Rodeos’ rendition of the wild horse race is indicative of the general experience of the convict participants and the prison board’s favor of spectacle over the safety of the inmates themselves. Another popular event called “Hard Money” saw fifty convicts competing to snatch a bag containing fifty dollars, while on foot, from between the horns of a rampaging bull. Most rodeos only allowed around thirty or so participants in this event, but the prison rodeo allowed for as many prisoners as possible to compete in order to enhance the spectacle. The Texas Prison Rodeo was also home to chariot races, whereby chariots were led by either teams of horses or bulls, an event which could be found in very few professional rodeos (“World’s Roughest Rodeo”). No matter the inherent and increased danger present in these events, many male convicts regularly participated. Female prison inmates, however, were not allowed to participate in any of these events (Gnagy 128). Instead, the Texas Prison Board hired professional female riders, who would perform in barrel races, calf roping, trick riding, and mounted quadrilles, where a team of four female riders would perform a routine with their mounts (“31st Annual Prison Rodeo – green). The Texas Prison Rodeo became so popular, however, that it also drew performances from the day’s biggest stars.

In partnership with the Texas Prison Rodeo’s dangerous events, the star-studded performers that came to the rodeo further placed it in the national spotlight. For instance, Dan Blocker, star of hit series “Bonanza,” as well as baseball player Willie Mays, Western star Rex Allen and his horse, Koko, recording artist Anita Bryant, John Wayne, Steve McQueen and many more celebrity faces performed at the Texas Prison Rodeo (“31st Annual Prison Rodeo”). The rodeo also featured top musical performers such as the all-female prison band, the Goree Gals, who performed nationally, and many other groups which performed classic Southern music (“Don’t Miss the Musical Entertainment”). As such, the Texas Prison Rodeo drew Southerners who already enjoyed the rodeo and southern entertainment, as well as people from other states who were interested in experiencing perceived Southern living. Such popularity, however, would not last.

The Closure of the Rodeo and Attempted Re-Establishment

As Texas became increasingly urbanized, demand for rodeo-style entertainment began to fade. Therefore, as new inmates to Texas prisons came from increasingly urban areas, such individuals had absolutely no experience with livestock and thus no interest in participating in the prison rodeo. As such, while thousands of inmates expressed interest in the rodeo in the early 30s and 40s, mere hundreds of prisoners expressed interest in the 70s and 80s. Moreover, the Texas Prison System was beginning to shift away from agricultural labor under the leadership of then prison system director O.B. Ellis (Price 53-55). The Texas Prison Rodeo’s profits began to drop significantly in the early seventies, decreasing by about half to about $100,000 annually on average (“Prison Rodeo Nets”). The first significant rumblings of the closing of the Texas Prison Rodeo came in 1985, when the rodeo brought in an especially low profit of $45,000, which the prison board attributed to heavy rains that October. It was not until profit margins tightened that legislators began to doubt the rodeo. Harry Whittington, a senior member of the Texas Department of Correction’s board in 1985, was the first to lead the charge against the rodeo, stating, “The legislature never authorized it. There is potential liability for board members who conduct operations outside the statutes. I’m not comfortable having that type of extra hazardous liability” (“Prison Board May Wrangle Over Rodeo). Many prison reformers agreed with Whittington, citing the extreme danger to inmates participating in the rodeo. The final blow to the Texas Prison Rodeo arrived in 1987, when the prison rodeo stadium fell into such a state of disrepair that estimated renovations would have totaled upwards of $800,000, which the Texas State Government was unwilling to finance (“Prison Rodeo Bites Dust”). As, such, the Texas Prison Rodeo officially ended in 1987. Only eight years later, however, Bell County officials within the city of Belton proposed reviving the Texas Prison Rodeo as a part of the Texas State Fair (“Bell County Officials”). This proposal received immediate backlash, however, from journalists such as Jen Kerkhoff, who argued, “One thing seems obvious: The people who discontinued the prison rodeo had the foresight to see that it was an institution best left in the past, along with slavery and involuntary servitude. Profiting from this type of backwards foolishness is not in Texas’ best interest” (“Selfish Cruelty to Revive”). Considering these objections, the Texas Prison Board ruled against reviving the Texas Prison Rodeo. Such objections, however, do not even scrape the surface of the mismanagement and mistreatment within the Texas Prison Rodeo.

Forced and Racialized Labor

Forced and racialized labor within the Texas Prison System began in the early 19th century and persisted until the late 20th century. In the 1920s, white and Hispanic inmates were often sent to mines or participated in railroad construction. Meanwhile, black inmates were almost exclusively sent to prison farms, where they would pick cotton. As cotton was integral to Texas’ economy, however, by the 1930s almost all prisoners, no matter race, were consigned to agricultural labor (Price 49). The Virginia Supreme Court case of *Ruffin v. Commonwealth* in 1871 ruled that prisoners were slaves to the state, a precedent which the Texas Department of Corrections took advantage of fully. This ruling was not overturned until 1974 in the United States Supreme Court case of *Wolff v. McDonnel,* but even thereafter Texas prisoners participated in forced agricultural labor (“History of Prisoner’s Rights”). While the majority of individuals who did agricultural labor in prison farms in Texas were black, black individuals were often not represented within the Texas Prison Rodeo. Most of the men who participated as riders in the events were white, while black men were more likely to serve auxiliary roles such as rodeo clowns or livestock handlers (Lucko 48). The role of the clown is particularly dangerous, especially for those who have not been extensively trained. As the role of the clown is to distract the bull from the rider once he has been thrown off or to physically interact with the bull to allow for the rider to dismount, these unexperienced clowns would have been in extreme danger, perhaps more so than the equally unexperienced riders.

While one could argue that the fact that prisoners were paid overrides any notions of forced or racialized labor within the Texas Prison Rodeo, this payment is indicative of many problems within the Texas Prison System. For instance, many of the prisoners in the Texas prison system through the 1970s were from poor, rural areas. As such, when faced with the task of forced, unpaid agricultural labor or a paid bout in the most dangerous rodeo in the world, many inmates chose the latter out of sheer desperation. Each participant received five dollars for every day he performed in the rodeo and had the opportunity to earn prizes up to one-hundred dollars if he won certain main events (Coffield). Yet even these rates were severely below what a professional rider or even amateur rider, risking life and limb, would make. As such, the Texas Prison Rodeo offered inmates a four-day respite from forced agricultural labor and corporal punishment to perform in the most dangerous show in the United States, just to be abysmally compensated and returned to forced labor despite accumulated injuries.

Misappropriation of Funds and Mistreatment of Prisoners

Although there was a clear national interest in the Texas Prison Rodeo, which in turn generated a great deal of income for the State of Texas, it is not always clear where these funds went. According to H. H. Coffield, who served as director of the rodeo committee within the Texas Board of Corrections for fourteen years, ending in 1964, stated that the whole of the profits from each production of the Texas Prison Rodeo, almost always totaling $200,000 were dedicated to the “Educational and Recreational Fund,” which funded prisoner medical care and educational services, amenities which were not provided by the state. Yet an undated advertisement found in the Texas Collection at Baylor University states that some funds, especially license fees, from the rodeo benefited construction and maintenance of Texas Highways (“Texas Highway Department”). Yet, as Whittington noted, the Texas Prison Rodeo was never truly sanctioned by the Texas Government, and was thus unlikely to pay licensing fees to the state. Moreover, as reported in 1958, only $160,000 was dedicated to the Educational and Recreational Fund, thus begging the question as to where an entire forty-thousand dollars ended up (“When Outlaws Meet”). Such suggests that the corruption and greed that plagued the Texas Prison System did not end with the introduction of the Texas Prison Rodeo. While one could argue that operating costs would have driven down profits, operating costs were minimal as police provided security, local farmers and ranchers would provide livestock, and the rodeo was often sponsored by paying brands (Blue 170). Therefore, while more extensive research would be required to establish the exact source of missing funding, the statistics indicate that such a gap exists.

Even before the Texas Prison Rodeo began, inmates in the Texas Prison System suffered their share of undeserved cuts and bruises. For instance, Lee Simmons, the founder of the Texas Prison Rodeo, was dismissed from his position as director due to his over-use of the “bat,” a twenty-four inch long, six-inch wide leather strap with a wooden handle, which was used to whip prisoners (Price 52). Even in the 1970s, a popular punishment in Texas prisons saw an inmate stand on a barrel for twelve hours straight. If he fell off, he would be forced to repeat the act until he stayed on for the entire twelve hours (Price 49). Moreover, studies conducted in 1913, 1915, 1923, 1925, 1928, and 1940 all found that Texas facilities were lacking in medical and rehabilitative facilities, were plagued by excessive escape attempts, and over-zealous enforced “discipline,” which could be interpreted as corporal punishment (Price 51). Yet such studies did not encourage the Texas Prison System to make drastic changes. In fact, the landmark case, *Ruiz v. Estelle,* which reached the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas in 1980, ruled that the conditions of incarceration within the Texas Department of Correction constituted cruel and unusual punishment, which thus violated the constitutional rights of those imprisoned in Texas (Price 57). The Texas Prison Rodeo, however, did not end until 1987. Such shows that notions of brutality, such as those expressed by W.M. Imboden, a Texas State Senator in 1913 who opposed prison reform, “Many negroes expect to be whipped, ought to be whipped, and must be whipped if they are to be made to labor . . . and certainly as convicts they must be made to labor” were not lost in the Texas Prison System, even in the late twentieth century (Jach 66). Even if an inmate was a repeatedly successful rider in the Texas Prison Rodeo, this did not mean that he would be immune to brutal corporal punishments and extensive working hours. Although participating inmates were expected to practice for performance in the rodeo after the official stadium was built in 1950, the bulk of their time was still dedicated to agricultural labor. In 1974, Texas inmates were still forced to work in “hoe squads,” harvesting cotton with wooden hoes, an antiquated means of harvesting cotton but arguably an effective form of punishment (Price 57).

Even if prisoners were allowed to participate in the rodeo, however, they faced equal mistreatment. For instance, the convict riders had little to no training to perform some of the most dangerous acts in the world, for which professional rodeo competitors train their entire lives (Price 47). Moreover, while only two deaths and two escapes were officially reported in the entire history of the Texas Prison Rodeo, such statistics do not account for the number of men gored by bulls, who broke bones, who fell from their mounts, who were stomped on or run over by their mounts, and who experienced concussions and lacerations over the course of fifty years (Coffield). Yet because the Texas Prison Rodeo was never officially sanctioned by the Texas State Government (despite the fact that the Department of Corrections had an established rodeo committee) such prisoners were not entitled to settlement for losses. Moreover, it is extremely unlikely that those men who experienced injuries within the rodeo were allowed to take time off from picking cotton, as defined Texas Prison servitude.

Texas Prison Rodeo as Exemplar of Continued Need for Reform

While the Texas Prison Rodeo received a seemingly endless amount of praise in its over fifty years of operation, the rodeo is indicative of the endemic failure of the Texas Prison System in its mistreatment of prisoners, misappropriation of funds, and forced as well as racialized labor. Yet these problems within the Texas Prison System did not end with the Texas Prison Rodeo, many still persist today. For instance, private prisons within the state of Texas, such as the largest private prison in the United States, Reeves County Detention Complex, are often accused of forcing their inmates to work twelve-hour, unpaid shifts (“Former Detainees Can Sue . . .”). Moreover, Texas has the largest prison population in the United States and highest rate of incarceration of African Americans compared to that of whites at a ratio of three to one (“Race and Imprisonment in Texas”). As such, issues of forced and racialized labor within the Texas Prison System have not faded, but instead have only become more prominent. These issues cannot be fixed by building a stadium and forcing Texas inmates to risk life and limb for our entertainment. These are human lives that are being crushed under the weight of an unjust system. Unless inmates deserved to be gored and trampled by the raging, unfeeling bull that is the Texas Prison System, reformers must step up and propose holistic plans to fix a broken system and legislators must be open to consequently preserving the lives and dignity of prisoners within the state of Texas.

Works Cited

\*Associated Press. “Bell County Officials Hope to Revive Texas Prison Rodeo.” *The Houston Chronicle,* 16 August 1992. Print.

\*Associated Press. “Officials Ponder Revival of Texas Prison Rodeo.” *Valley Morning Star,* 22 May 2000. Print.

\*Associated Press. “Prison Rodeo Nets $100,000; Officials to Study it’s Feasibility.” *The Tribune-Herald,* n.d. Print.

Blue, Ethan. *Doing Time in the Depression: Everyday Life in Texas and California Prisons.* New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print

\*Coffield, Hubert Hardison. “Texas Prison Rodeo.” Manuscript. Print.

“Former Detainees Can Sue Private Prisons for Forced Labor.” *Texasstandard.org,* 2017.

Gnagy, Caroline. “As if They Were Going Places: Class and Gender Portrayals through Country Music in the Texas State Prison 1938-1944.” *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music.* Oxford: Mississippi University Press, 2016. Web.

“History of Prisoner’s Rights.” *Corrections.eku.edu,* 2013.

Jach, Theresa R. “Reform versus Reality in the Progressive Era Texas Prison.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4.1 (2005): 53-67. Web.

\*Kerkhoff, Jen. “Selfish Cruelty to Revive Prison Rodeo.” *The Houston Chronicle,* n.d. Print.

Lucko, Paul M. “A Missed Opportunity: Texas Prison Reform During the Dan Moody Administration, 1927-1931.” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* vol. 96.1 (1992): 27-52. Web.

\*n.a. “World’s Roughest Rodeo.” *Southwest Features,* n.d. Print.

\*n.a. “You and Your Rodeo Dollar.” *The Echo,* September 1962. Print.

\*Nichols, Bruce. “Prison Board May Wrangle Over Rodeo.” *The Dallas Morning News,* 13 January 1985. Print.

Price, Keith and Susan Coleman. “Narrative of Neglect: Texas Prisons for Men.” *East Texas Historical Journal* vol. 49.2 (2011): 44-68. Web.

“Race and Imprisonment in Texas.” *Justicepolicy.org,* 2005.

\*Redding, Stan. “When Outlaws Meet, It’s a Rodeo with a Purpose.” *The Houston Chronicle,* 21 September 1958. Print.

\*Rodeo Ticket Office. “It’s a Knockout!” Huntsville: n.p., n.d. Print.

\*Texas Highway Department. “See the Texas Prison Rodeo!” Austin: n.p., n.d. Print.

\*The City of Huntsville. “Come Early . . . Stay Late.” Huntsville: n.p., n.d. Print.

\*The Texas Prison Rodeo. “31st Annual Prison Rodeo.” Huntsville: n.p., n.d. Print.

\*The Texas Prison Rodeo. “Don’t Miss the Musical Entertainment.” Huntsville: n.p.. n.d. Print.

“Wild Horse Race History.” *Mountainhighbroncsandbulls.com,* 2017.

*Entries preceded by “\*” were found at the Texas Collection at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.*

Annotated Bibliography

Blue, Ethan. *Doing Time in the Depression: Everyday Life in Texas and California Prisons.* New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print

This work focuses on the bloodsport presented by the Texas Prison Rodeo as well as certain anecdotes about racial relations therein. Blue points out the relationship between injury in the rodeo and the thrill of the crowd. This piece was extremely important in establishing the risk prisoners faced when they entered the rodeo as well as the mindset of those who made up the audience Blue also establishes the Texas Prison Rodeo in a tradition of violent entertainment that occurred within the South, especially Texas.

Covington, Jeanette. “The Social Construction of the Minority Drug Problem.” *Social Justice* vol. 24.4 (1997): 117-147. Web.

This piece explores the perceived issue of minority drug use within the United States and the consequent incarceration of black Americans. As I will be arguing that the Texas Prison System is still broken, this piece shows the institutionalized racism that persists within the general American prison system as well as that of Texas in particular. Such shows the continued theme of mistreatment of prisoners within the Texas Prison System as well as its failure rehabilitate convicts. This racialized system is a continuation of an institution that has persisted with minimal reform for centuries and must be stopped.

Gnagy, Caroline. “As if They Were Going Places: Class and Gender Portrayals through Country Music in the Texas State Prison 1938-1944.” *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music.* Oxford: Mississippi University Press, 2016. Web.

This work focuses on gender relations and depictions of gender within Texas prisons. Gnagy offers an insightful understanding of the differences between men and women in their respective penitentiaries. She also highlights the differences in recreational activities offered by women and men’s penitentiaries, with men being more inclined towards physical acts and women forming musical groups. This document was essential to explaining the male-female differences in Texas State Prisons.

Jach, Theresa R. “Reform versus Reality in the Progressive Era Texas Prison.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4.1 (2005): 53-67. Web. 9 April 2017.

In this piece, Jach explains how the agricultural farm system of Texas State Penitentiaries was used not only to force black people to continue slave-type labor after emancipation, but also how this system made it difficult for the Texas prison system to adapt to changing times. As Texas State prisons made most of their money through the agricultural work that the convicts completed, when Texas citizens became centered more and more in urban areas, they entered state prisons without the knowledge or capability to complete agricultural tasks. As such progressive reforms ultimately failed because they did not address this racialized labor control. Such sets a precedent for why the Texas prison system is so flawed and why they would look to institute a program like the Texas Prison Rodeo.

Lucko, Paul M. “A Missed Opportunity: Texas Prison Reform During the Dan Moody Administration, 1927-1931.” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* vol. 96.1 (1992): 27-52. Web.

This pieces serves as a depiction of one of the many administrative failings of the Texas prison system. Lucko details the many movements, including feminist, which put pressure on the Texas state government to reform its prison system. It shows the sheer struggle of prison reformers in the face of the broken system within the Texas prison system. It is the failure of these reforms which would ultimately provide the foundation for the construction of the Texas Prison Rodeo in 1932. The massive amount of money brought in by the rodeo would silence agents of reform for decades, although the rodeo seemed beneficial while it actually allowed previous failings of the system to persist.

Price, Keith and Susan Coleman. “Narrative of Neglect: Texas Prisons for Men.” *East Texas Historical Journal* vol. 49.2 (2011): 44-68. Web. 18 April 2017.

This piece offers a detailed overview of the entire history of the Texas prison system, specifically highlighting the injustices that Texas prisoners have faced and the administrative shortcomings that caused this suffering. It shows that the Texas prison system was very much racialized, and has been argued to be a legal continuation of slave and sharecropping labor. The authors also explore the reasons behind the explosions of inmate populations in Texas and how the state responded to these increases. This piece will be essential as I examine the history of the Texas prison system and examine possible routes of reform.

Ramer, Ben G., Owen J. Murray, and John S. Pulvino. “Health Care in the Texas Prison System: A Looming Fiscal Crisis.” *Texas Public Health Journal* vol. 62.4 (2010): 12-17. Web. 18 April 2017.

This piece offers an insight into the Texas prison system’s struggle to provide health care to Texas inmates. It also shows how the system is dealing with inmates with mental illness and serious diseases. This piece will be important in my analysis of the theme within this institution of failing to provide proper medical care to inmates. It will be extremely useful as I examine what exactly causes this downfall within the Texas prison system.

Winter, Bill. “Crowded Texas Prisons Force Tough Choices.” *American Bar Association Journal* 68.1 (1982): 791. Web. 9 April 2017.

This is a short article, but it is a primary source that shows the massive problem that Texas prisons were facing when the Texas Prison Rodeo was in its final throes. At this point, a great deal of money had to be spent to build more prisons for Texas’ ever-expanding convict population. This explains why there was no money to repair the Texas Prison Rodeo stadium and why the program was eventually shut down. I will need to explore why there was such an explosion in convictions during this time, but this article shows that whatever the reason, the prison system in Texas was in a lot of trouble.