

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF PRIVATE PRISON SCANDALS IN TEXAS—2/28/03**

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Texas' experience with the privatization of prisons, jails, and detention facilities has been far from an unqualified success. Voluminous evidence suggests that private prisons correlate with decreased security, inadequate staff training and equipment, inadequate protection of prisoners' human rights, degrading prison conditions, and poor employment standards. Newspaper reports are replete with accounts of escapes, abuse of inmates, and financial mismanagement. Every private prison operator has experienced these problems. Following are summaries of some of the most-publicized scandals and the dates they were reported:

- **Brazoria County Detention Center (Angleton, TX)—CCRI**
  - guards made a training video of themselves beating, stun-gunning, and unleashing dogs on naked prisoners from Missouri; injured inmates were dragged face down back to their cells (1997)
  - hired convicted felons as guards (1997)
  - typical menu was inadequate and inappropriate (1997)
  
- **Coke County Juvenile Justice Center (Bronte, TX)--Wackenhut**
  - several girls were sexually, physically, and mentally abused by Wackenhut employees, including a man with prior conviction for sexual abuse of a child; a lawsuit settled for \$1.5 million (1999)
  - TYC confirmed allegations that some staff members manipulated a "demotion/graduation" system to coerce girls into giving them sexual favors or dancing naked in front of them; some girls were raped or fondled, while others were made to disrobe and shower in the presence of male employees (1995)
  - 15-year old female victim of sexual assault by Wackenhut employee committed suicide in wake of lawsuit settlement that allowed company to avoid accepting responsibility (1999)
  
- **Cornell Corrections**
  - class action lawsuit filed alleging violations of the Securities Exchange Act, and claiming company issued favorable but false and misleading statements about the Company's business (2002)
  - company had to restate earnings because of an innovative off-the-books transaction that violated the same SEC rules that exposed Enron's partnerships (2002)
  
- **Corrections Corporation of America**
  - daylong riot in which shotgun-toting guards clashed with 400 boisterous prisoners at a low-security facility and at least 17 people were hurt (Eden Detention Center-1996)
  - two escapes followed by a high-speed car chase (Bartlett State Jail--2000)
  - pulled out of a pre-release prison, citing a disagreement with the local school board over money owed in lieu of taxes (Cleveland Pre-Release Center—1998)
  - four escapes (Liberty County Jail--1995-99)
  - 23 inmates and 6 staff contracted *e-coli* due to poor kitchen hygiene (Mineral Wells Pre-Parole Facility--2000)

- **Dickens County Correctional Facility (Spur, TX)--Bobby Ross Group**
  - Montana inmates housed here went hungry and had to wait days for medical care (1997)
  - Company did not fully comply with 15 of 22 provisions of the contract with the state of Montana. Violations included food service, medical care, security, inmate transfers and disciplinary actions, according to a report done by Montana prison officials. (1997)
  - One inmate was killed in a brawl, a near-riot had to be halted by gunfire from guards, a warden was fired, and two Montana escapees remain on the loose (1996-97)
  
- **McLennan County Detention Center (Waco, TX)--CiviGenics**
  - escape of a prisoner who is charged with killing a woman while he was a fugitive and arrest of a guard charged with facilitating the escape (2001)
  - resignations of four top detention center officials (2001-02)
  - an inmate disturbance and fire (2001-02)
  - failed jail inspection (2002)
  
- **Tarrant County Community Corrections Facility (Mansfield Boot Camp) (Fort Worth, TX)--CSC**
  - Nurse convicted of negligent homicide in inmate death (2002)
  - Accusations of sexual misconduct by male guards against female inmates have plagued the camp since it opened in 1992. The facility has also endured accusations of staff shortages and questions of proper medical care. (2001)
  - Lawsuits filed about sexual abuse charges and Sen. Chris Harris testified against the company saying that it was “cutting corners” because of the “corporate bottom line.” (2001)
  - Tarrant County cancelled its contract with CSC (2001)
  
- **Texas Commission on Jail Standards (Austin, TX)**
  - Commission’s deputy director was moonlighting as a consultant for a private company (Bobby Ross Group) that operates jails regulated by the commission, including the Dickens County Facility to which he gave a clean bill of health. Neither he nor the Commission’s executive director saw a conflict between the two positions. Gov. Bush fired the deputy director. (1997)
  
- **Travis County State Jail (Austin, TX)—Wackenhut**
  - 11 former guards and a case manager were indicted on felony charges of sexual assault and improper sexual activity as well as misdemeanor charges of sexual harassment. The state is also investigating fraud. (1999)
  - TDCJ had to retake control of the facility (1999)
  
- **Willacy County State Jail (Raymondville, TX)—Wackenhut**
  - Following an escape, TDCJ learned that electronic sensors on the perimeter fence had not worked since the facility was built, six to eight of the security television monitors were inoperable, and a perimeter patrol officer was sleeping in a car the night of the escape. (2001)

More details about these and many other incidents as well as cites to newspaper articles may be found on the website of the Florida Police Benevolent Association at:

[http://www.flpba.org/private/CT\\_shame.htm#TEXAS](http://www.flpba.org/private/CT_shame.htm#TEXAS)