

Prisons, Profits, and Hard Labor: A Brief History of Convict Labor in Florida

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The purpose of this research is to develop a broader understanding of the system in Florida. Specifically, I am looking at the privatization of convict labor programs by the Prison Rehabilitative Industries and Diversified Enterprises Corporation (PRIDE) in the 1980s and 1990s in state correctional institutions. This research will contribute to historiography of prisons in Florida in the context of the developing research about the Prison-Industrial Complex. Many scholars studying the Prison-Industrial Complex have drawn comparisons to today's prison industries and the convict lease system of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, seeing the prison system go full circle drawing attention to the exploitative and institutionally racist nature of the modern prison system. This research showed that the trend other scholars have studied also exist in Florida and Florida was actually a pioneer in the Prison-Industrial Complex. It was the first state to privatize its convict labor programs, becoming a model for other states. This research also shows that political and economic motivations were the primary forces governing prison policies, rather than education, rehabilitation, and safety. To complete this project, I analyzed articles from South Florida newspapers, such as the Sun-Sentinel and the Miami Herald, published during this period as well as literature published by the Department of Corrections. The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world and spends more money on prisons than education. Being such a large part of country, prisons warrant more critical study. This research will shed light on the nature of prisons, specifically here in Florida, in the hopes of seeking alternatives.