

The Rise and Fall of Control Penology in the Texas Prison System: 1948-1983

Nicole Kraus, PhD, Keith Price, PhD, and Lisa Garza, PhD
Departments of Criminal Justice and Sociology

Problems in TX Prisons

Outdated Agricultural methods
Housing and supervision of prisoners
Situational homosexuality
Brutality and violence

After the end of WWII, in 1945 an influx of veterans leads to a corresponding influx in prisoners

THE RISE OF CONTROL PENOLOGY: Modernization on the backs of prisoners



O.B. Ellis (Director, TDC 1948-1961)

Former President of National Criminology Association
Running a successful penal farm in Tennessee in a slave Plantation style
TX Board hires Ellis to head the Texas Department of Corrections in 1948

Ellis Plan

- Overall promise is to make improvements at low cost
- Used his budget to accomplish major changes

Agricultural Production and Construction

- Updated mule-pulled plows with tractors, increasing production
- Develops unpaid prisoner Construction Division to cut labor costs for building
 - Builds cell blocks to replace crowded and outdated dormitories
 - Builds on-site apartments and housing for officers

Increases rehabilitation programs

- Vocational Education
 - Then used these SKILLED workers for free labor (Ag and Construction)
 - Prisoners had a trade when released
- General Education Development Program (to earn High School Diplomas)
- Starts Alcoholics Anonymous Chapters to treat inmates

Professionalizing Prison personnel

- Provides the first uniforms
- Modest salary increases
- Officer training programs
- Amenities for officers: Laundry, free meals, barber shops
- Exploited the labor of inmates as unpaid servant "House Boys" for prison supervisors

Some things he could (or did) NOT change

- Continued HEAVY Reliance on *Building Tenders*—hundreds of unpaid inmates used to guard and discipline others
 - Did not replace this labor with professional staff
- State Prison Farm staff remained insular, isolated
 - Multi-generational, remote East Texan "Good Old Boys" with tight social networks
 - Difficulties in oversight/discipline of prison administrators
 - High potential for corruption, hiding misbehavior



BETO'S DEFINITION OF CONTROL PENOLOGY

- Strict Discipline
- Coercive Labor
- Corporal Punishment

BETO'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Repression

- Crushed Work Strike at Harlem State Prison Farm (seen above) mounting Wardens and arming them with wet ropes to beat prisoners into submission

Prisoner Education

- Convinced the Legislature to create an independent School district to serve the disparate E. Texas Prisons (Windham Dist.)
 - Thus the Department of Education was forced to shoulder the expense of educating inmates
- Established relationships with local community colleges so inmates could earn Associate's Degrees

Prison Profits

- Expanded prison production
- Arranged for State agencies to purchase prison products to increase profitability and save the state money



PERFECTING CONTROL PENOLOGY: Profitable Prisoners find the Baseball Bat and the Bible

Dr. George Beto (Director TDC 1962-1972)

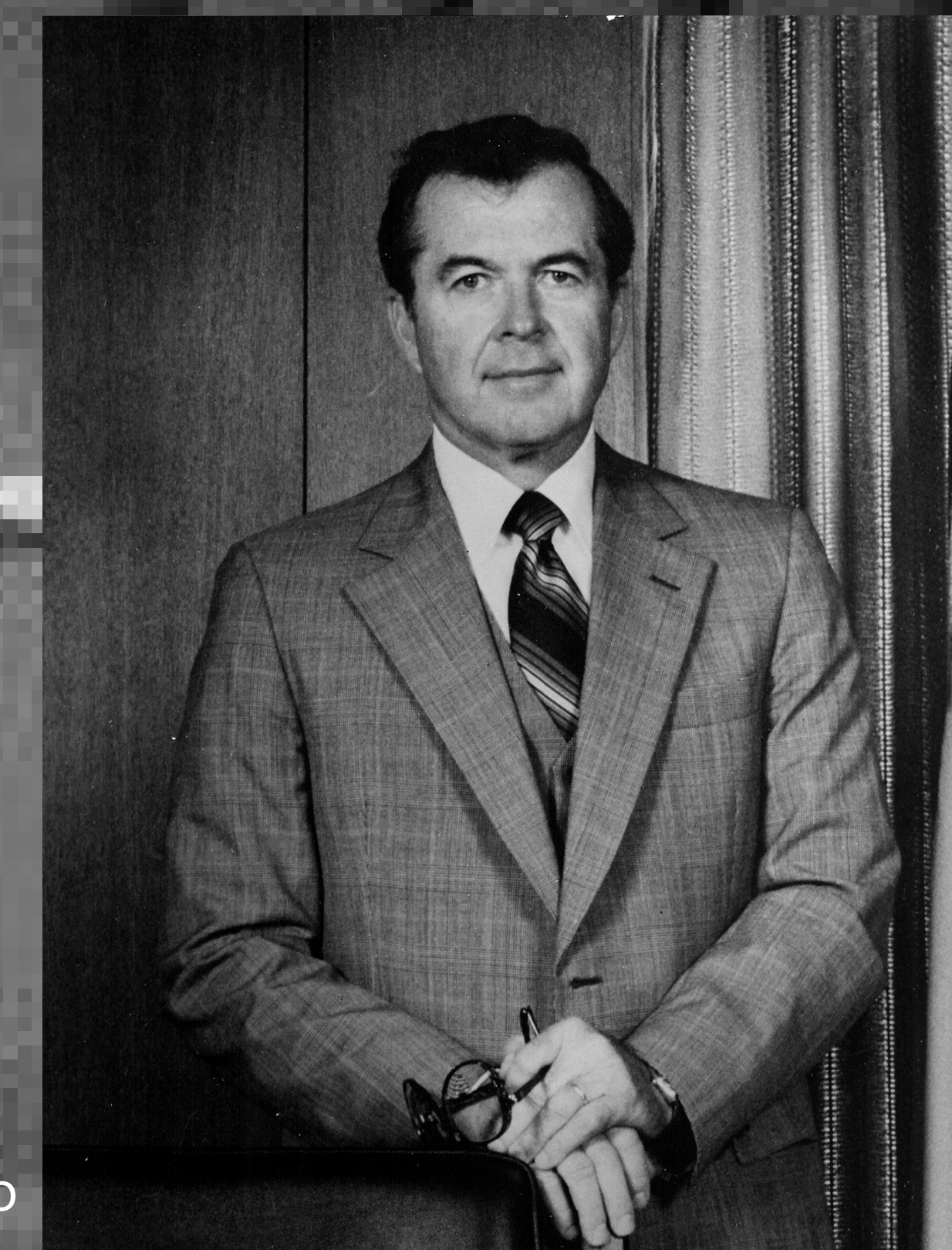
Member of the Texas Prison Board since 1953
Strong supporter of Control Penology
Lutheran Minister
Educational Administrator by trade



THREE BIG PROBLEMS REMAINED

- 1) System still heavily relied on Building Tenders
- 2) Courts were becoming more involved with how prisons ran their business
- 3) High personnel turnover made the continuation of Control Penology nearly impossible to maintain

THE FALL OF AMERICA'S PRISON MODEL: Losing Control Penology



W.J. Estelle (Director TDC 1972-1983)

Hand picked successor to Beto
Previous California Prison Camp Admin
Most recently Warden at Montana prison

Huge Rise in Prison Population

Texas prisons nearly double in size
Oversaw continued prison construction

Continued emphasis on Profits & Savings

- Added new prison industrial factories, increasing profits
- Budget from the state remained the same despite huge growth in population

Violent Repression

"Father's Day Incident"

- Inmate work protest on Father's Day when denied family visit; 10 locked up, then forced to proceed through officer gauntlet during which they were beaten
- Similar incident repeated only months later
- July 24, 1973 Violent inmate takeover in Huntsville prison lasted 11 days, resulted in the deaths of two inmates and two female librarians

Personnel problems

- With the increase in prisoner population, Estelle relied more heavily than EVER on the unpaid and largely unregulated Building Tenders
- In 1981 an inmate murdered both a Farm Manager and Warden; he was later judged not guilty because of self-defense

Legal Troubles

Civil Rights Law Suits

- Ruiz v. Estelle* decision changes nearly everything the TDC does and is the death knell for Control Penology