

## Discipline and the Performance of Punishment: Welcome to “The Wildest Show in the South”

Mary Rachel Gould

*Once described as the bloodiest and most dangerous prison in the United States, the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola hosts one of the only remaining prison rodeo and crafts fair in the United States. The event, more commonly known as “The Wildest Show in the South” is open to visitors every Sunday in October and for one weekend in April. Advertisements for the day-long event promise “untrained convicts roping and wrangling livestock” and the opportunity to browse among “authentic” prison crafts and concessions. Employing Victor Turner’s classic understanding of the workings of the social drama and Diana Taylor’s approach to the study of a scenario, this essay illustrates how the Louisiana State Penitentiary, through the careful staging and performance of a rodeo and crafts fair, renders the prison and the bodies of the incarcerated men as objects of desire, commodification and control. The Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair transforms the prison into a space of tourism, the incarcerated men into objects of surveillance, and returns punishment to that of a spectacle by offering the bodies of the incarcerated as a form of public entertainment.*

*Keywords: Louisiana State Penitentiary, prison rodeo, social drama, spectacle, surveillance*

### Introduction

The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead* (1862)

There is more than one scene in the film *Dead Man Walking* (1995) where Sister Helen Prejean, played by Susan Sarandon, drives from New Orleans to Angola, Louisiana, to the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Prejean makes the drive to visit Matthew Poncelet, a man sentenced to die for the kidnap and murder of two teenagers. The driving scenes in the film serve an explicit purpose; the drive is both transformative and reflexive as it moves Prejean, and the audience, from the “outside” to the “inside”

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**Editor’s note:** A multimedia version of this essay, which includes audio, video, and images in addition to this text, can be found at <http://liminalities.net/7-4/AngolaEssay/>.

and then back out again. Each scene captures Sarandon’s character deep in thought and lasts longer than is expected of a Hollywood feature film; absent of dialogue and tightly framed on Sarandon’s face—pained by the tensions associated with being the spiritual advisor to a man on death row—the scenes convey the chasm between the “free” and “incarcerated” worlds.

When I make this drive, albeit in much less dramatic fashion, I think about the men and women (visitors, soon-to-be incarcerated men, those being released, and employees) who, for almost two hundred years, have traveled the roads that lead to the Louisiana State Penitentiary.<sup>1</sup> There is not much in the way of visual entertainment between the Days Inn in Baton Rouge where I am staying for the weekend and the prison. Signs along Route 61 tell me this is a “Scenic Highway,” but I am not sure why, the landscape is barren and underresourced. Few drivers are on the road at 7:00 on a Sunday morning, so I lean out the window and snap some pictures of the formerly grand plantations homes that dot the highway and advertise “antebellum home” or “swamp” tours and of the empty stretches of highway I am about to pass over; I shoot a few minutes of video, too. It does not take long to realize that making pictures and capturing video while driving distorts my depth perception, but, the process of “data” collection is a welcome distraction. Today, on my first visit to the prison, I am consumed by the feeling that I am lost.

Forty-five minutes into the drive, somewhere along Highway 66, I find reassurance in the line of cars that begins to form behind me, and the trickle of cars that I catch up to in front of me. The procession lasts another fifteen miles until we all dead end at the front gate of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. It sounds a bit cliché to say, but the prison *is* the last stop on Highway 66. The main gate to the prison is fifty-four long miles away from Baton Rouge. We have all made the drive for the same reason, to participate, as tourists and spectators, in the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair.

Twenty cars line-up ahead of me; in the rearview mirror it is difficult to see the end of the traffic jam building beyond the entrance to the prison. We all sit in our cars and wait another thirty minutes before we are permitted onto the grounds of the prison. Ten thousand tickets, at a cost of \$10.00 each, are sold for the rodeo, the maximum capacity for the stadium; the crafts fair is free and not limited to a set amount of visitors. The popularity of both events illustrates our contemporary culture’s fascination with crime and criminality. Penal tourism is a rapidly growing industry in the United States, undoubtedly an offspring of the success of television crime shows and feature films about the prison system.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> During the American Civil War (1861-1865) the property that is now the Louisiana State Penitentiary served as either a Union or Confederate prison. In 1869, the land was officially purchased by Samuel Lawrence James, a major in the former Confederate Army, and the James family continued to use the property as a prison.

<sup>2</sup> For more on prison tourism and/or public fascination with crime and punishment, see: Jessica Adams, ‘The Wildest Show in the South: Tourism and Incarceration at Angola’. *The Drama Review* 45 (2001), p. 94-108.; John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The*

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Since 1869, Angola has served as a prison warehouse for the State of Louisiana. During Reconstruction every man and many women convicted of a crime in the state was turned over to Major Samuel Lawrence James, who created his own penal colony on the former “Angola Plantation,” which the James family purchased for \$100,000. Once the Angola Plantation, the 1,8000 acre prison farm, approximately the size of Manhattan, still bares the name of the African region where most of the slaves who worked the land were taken from. A significant portion of the men and women serving time at Angola were incarcerated because of violating the infamous “Black Codes,” the southern laws that limited the freedoms of emancipated black men and women.<sup>3</sup> By transforming the plantation to a penitentiary the slave economy in Louisiana seamlessly became a prison economy.

By the 1920s, the State of Louisiana had taken control of the prison in response to reports of extensive abuses suffered by the incarcerated men and women at the hands of Major James and his family. Since the time of the state’s intervention until well into the 1970s, the prison experienced cycles of reform and repression.<sup>4</sup> One of the most tumultuous times in Angola’s history occurred just before the Civil Rights era of the 1960s. In 1951, a group of thirty-one white men slashed their own Achilles tendons in a desperate effort to bring attention to the brutal conditions at Angola.

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*Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Thompson Press, 2000); Robert Perkinson, ‘Angola and the Agony of Prison Reform’. *Radical Philosophy Review*, 3 (2000), p. 8-19.; Phillip Stone, ‘A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions’. *Tourism*, 54 (2006), p. 145-160.; Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, ‘Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island’. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30 (2003), p. 386-405.; Phillip E. Tarlow, “Dark Tourism: The Appealing ‘Dark Side’ of Tourism and More” in Marina Novelli (ed), *Niche Tourism—Contemporary Issues, Trends and Cases* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), p. 47-58.

<sup>3</sup> In 1866, legislatures throughout the South, first introduced in Texas, began passing laws that would become known as the “Black Codes”; a set of laws explicitly designed to prohibit formerly enslaved men and women from participating in society as fully integrated citizens. The “Black Codes” places restrictions on travel, property ownership, participation in the legal process—as jury members or to testify against whites—and the right to vote. The legislation, and the subsequent arrest and incarceration of many formerly enslaved men and women, quickly transformed the prison system into a form of indentured servitude. The plantation-to-prison transformation of land throughout the south can be seen in the history and aesthetic of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. The practice of “convict leasing” emerged as a result of the incarceration of thousands of men and women in the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) and the years that followed. Some still see the period of Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era as having devastating consequences for black men and women and as a cause of the racial imbalance in the prison system. For a more nuanced discussion of legacy of the Jim Crow Era, see: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010, New Press).

<sup>4</sup> The *Los Angeles Times*’ on-line travel section described the history of the Louisiana State Penitentiary in an article about the 2008 Rodeo and Crafts Fair. <http://www.latimes.com/travel/la-trw-offbeattraveler.com>. 10 August 2008.

Known as the “Heel String Gang” this group of men brought temporary change to a corrupt prison system. A food riot, initiated by black men, followed the “heel-slashing” on Easter Sunday of the same year. Both acts of resistance drew significant public and political attention, resulting in the allocation of \$8 million to reform the prison, including building a new central penitentiary, expanding educational services, constructing housing separating men and women, and replacing striped uniforms with denim.<sup>5</sup>

Change in the prison system is slow and progress is often unpredictable, and in 1965 the prison was again at the center of controversy amid reports of abuse and mistreatment. Known as “America’s Worst Prison” in the 1950s, by the 1960s, Angola was considered “the bloodiest prison in the South”.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1960s, and particularly during the years that Burl Cain has served as warden (1995-present), the Louisiana State Penitentiary has been a glaring representation of the nostalgic approach to discipline that has prevailed in the southern United States. On this working farm, incarcerated men at Angola spend their days working fields of soybeans and cotton. They transport goods around the prison in mule-drawn carriages, often outfitted in striped uniforms. Angola is just one example of why southern prisons have historically been considered some of the most backwards in the country. Robert Perkinson, in studying the history of the plantation-to-prison model, argues that “dehumanization and popular vengeance” became the “selling points of a new punishment order” in the years immediately following the end of the Civil War; a tradition still present in many contemporary prisons.<sup>7</sup> The Louisiana State Penitentiary is a contemporary remnant of the plantation-to-prison system that spreads across the landscape of the southern United States. The history of the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola is put on display in the Angola Museum, located just outside of the gates of the prison.

The emergence of the prison rodeo as a popular form of entertainment, situated in a tradition of brutality and dehumanization, is part of the history of many prisons throughout the south.<sup>8</sup> Few maximum-security prisons in the United States continue

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<sup>5</sup> In 1961, the women incarcerated at The Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola were moved to the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women. Prior to 1961 men and women were housed, in separate units, at the prison.

<sup>6</sup> In a November 22, 1952, article *Collier’s Magazine* titled Angola “America’s Worst Prison”. A September 24, 1962, article in the *Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate* called Angola “the bloodiest prison in the south”. Both articles are on display in the Angola Museum.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Perkinson, ‘Angola and the Agony of Prison Reform’. *Radical Philosophy Review*, 3 (2000), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> The Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas hosted a prison rodeo from 1931 to 1986. In 1940, the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester, Oklahoma began hosting a “prisoner-run” rodeo. Because of state budget shortfalls the 2010 rodeo was “furloughed”, according to the McAlester Chamber of Commerce. For more information on the history of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, see: “History of the Louisiana State Penitentiary Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair.” <http://www.angolarodeo.com/history>.

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to host “prisoner-run rodeos,” and only Angola offers an “inmate-produced” arts and crafts festival; having research access to the event was granted to me by prison administration. Although I never had direct contact with Angola’s Warden, Burn Cain, I understand enough about the administration of a prison to know that he was the final word in granting my access.<sup>9</sup> Situated within the context of current crisis of mass incarceration in the United States, part of which is a crisis in representation, the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair exists as an embodied performance of discipline in the “theater of punishment” in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The United States incarcerates its own citizens at alarming and unprecedented rates. According to the most recent finding reported by the Department of Justice, 2.3 million men and women in the United States are incarcerated--1 in 100 adult citizens are in prison or jail and 1 in 31 adult citizens are under some form of state supervision (prison, jail, parole or probation). More than 50% of the men and women incarcerated in the United States are black and close to 10% are Latino. No other country in the world comes close to matching the United States’ corrections record.<sup>11</sup> Because few prisons throughout the United States are open to public participation a culture of silence and fear defines most non-incarcerated citizens’ relationship with the prison system. Events such as the Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair offer the possibility of opening up the space of silence. This essay explores what happens when the often hidden space of the prison system is made public.

According to the Angola Prison Rodeo Charter, the event was originally established in 1965, to provide “recreation for the inmate population and entertainment for employees,” and the gates to the rodeo were opened to the public two years later. Very quickly the financial success of the rodeo was realized, and in 1969, a 4,500-seat arena was built on the grounds of the prison. In 1997, the arena was expanded and three years later, as attendance continued to grow, the stadium was again rebuilt. In 2000, the men at Angola built a 10,000-seat rodeo stadium. Initially, the crafts fair was a separate enterprise, but in 1997, it was combined with the rodeo to provide visitors with a daylong festival. It is primarily the “lifers” who run, organize, and participate in the rodeo and crafts fair events, and it is these men who

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<sup>9</sup> My participation in four day-long rodeo and crafts fair events resulted in on-site, extended interviews with thirty-five visitors, six incarcerated men, and four prison employees, and continued conversations (via email) with twenty visitors and two incarcerated men (via handwritten letters). Research findings in this essay are based upon my experience attending the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair on Sunday, October 22, 2006; Saturday, April 21, 2007; Sunday April 22, 2007; and October 19, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Dwight Conquergood, ‘Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology’. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9 (1989), p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the growth of the U.S. prison population, specifically the “boom years” of 1972 to 2009, see: Mark Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York, NY: New Press, 1999). For more statistical findings related to race and incarceration see the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, ‘Jail Inmates at Midyear 2009’ and ‘Prison Inmates at Midyear 2009’, (30 April 2010). <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbse&sid=38>.

are able to mix and mingle with, sell hobby crafts to, and prepare food for curious tourists from the "outside." The crafts fair features thousands of pieces of art, referred to as "hobbycrafts," made by "jailhouse artists"; the rodeo, the more controversial of the two events, puts untrained "inmate cowboys" into the rodeo ring.

### **Eight Hours Behind the Razor Wire**

Precisely at 9:00 a.m. the first car is waved through the single entrance to the prison; the procession of cars that follows moves slowly. The interior of each car is visually inspected and the passengers are informed of the rules that govern the day. The slightly graying, white, male corrections officer that bellies up to my rental car tells me that I must leave any weapons, ammunition, alcohol, and drugs at the gate. Additionally, the man in the monochromatic blue uniform instructs me that any food, ice chests, pocketknives, medication, toolboxes, cameras, video cameras, and cell phones must remain locked in my vehicle. As a last line of defense, I am handed a list of rules on a half-sheet of paper; the same rules I was told moments ago. It is clear that my compliance with the rules of the event is vital to the efficacy of this performance. "Lock your vehicle" are the last words I hear as I begin to slowly drive down the two-lane road that bisects the main campus of the prison. Upon entering the prison it is evident that the aesthetic of pre-Civil War America is not lost. Fields of soybeans and cotton line the entry to the prison and are worked daily by crews of incarcerated men, most of whom are black, overseen by guards on horseback, most of whom are white. Established in 1868, the prison grew up during a time when white supremacy was custom, and law was dictated by the Black Codes. Historically, Angola is one of the most dangerous prisons in the United States, but it's a designation the prison is attempting to shed.

Every Sunday in October and for one weekend in April the prison hosts the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair, commonly known as the "Wildest Show in the South." The event is marketed as an opportunity for tourists to witness "untrained convicts roping and wrangling livestock" and the opportunity to browse among "authentic prisoner-produced" crafts and concessions. Attracting more than 70,000 tourists a year, the event is big business for the prison, the men currently incarcerated at Angola and the surrounding community. Prison administrators view the event as significant to the "health" of the prison. Yet, at Angola, more than 80% of Angola's population of 5,000 men will die within the prison's gates. The Louisiana State Penitentiary is rich in contradiction. Once a plantation, then the most dangerous prison in the United States, the prison farm is now a tourist attraction. In part, my visits to Angola are driven by an interest in seeing how, or if, the history of Angola is represented at the rodeo and crafts fair.

I park my rental car in a seemingly endless field. Because the prison is bordered by the Tunica Hills and the Mississippi River, which form a natural perimeter to the facility, security fences or barricades do not obstruct bucolic panoramic views. The early morning hours at Angola are serene. Less than fifty cars are lined up in neat

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rows; by the end of the day it will be almost impossible to see even a small patch of grass poking out between the rows of cars. The SUVs and pick-up trucks I park besides, all with Louisiana license plates, dwarf the Dodge Neon rental car I am driving. Early in the morning, before the bulk of the crowds arrive for the main event—the rodeo—most of the cars are local. I assume that many belong to prison employees; I am told that most prison employees will work at least a few hours during the event. Later in the day, when I return to the parking lot to drop off some of my recording equipment, I notice a few license plates from surrounding states (Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas); still, most cars have Louisiana tags. I pack up my equipment and head to the entrance. Because I am permitted “media access” I am allowed to carry a video camera, still camera, and audio recorder, along with my notebook. The “general public” is more limited in the items they can carry into the event.<sup>12</sup>

### **Setting the Stage**

My first trip to Angola was driven by curiosity. I returned for two more years to gain a better understanding of where the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair fits in the discourse about the prison system in the United States. After my first visit to Angola it became clear to me that the rodeo and crafts fair was a particular type of cultural performance, one that both permitted and prevented access and understanding. This study critically examines the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair as a performance space that shapes and defines the meaning of the prison system in contemporary culture. In this study I employ ethnographic methods: interviews, participant-observations, and surveys to answer a number of questions about the cultural performance staged at the rodeo and crafts fair. Some of the questions that guide this critical analysis include: How is the prison system perceived when it is staged as a tourist attraction? What is the significance of the role of each of the actors in the performance of the prison as a tourist attraction? What meaning(s) do currently non-incarcerated citizens attach to the prison system when it is experienced as a tourist attraction? What narrative(s) do tourists engage about their experience (during and after their visit) that uphold or challenge status quo notions about the prison system? Do tourists use the experience of participating in the rodeo and crafts fair as means to uphold or challenge the politics of incarceration?

I situate the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair as an element in the social drama of crime. Victor Turner’s model of the social drama might be one of the most fitting lenses to examine the phenomenon of crime in a highly mediated and technologically advanced culture. Turner defines the social drama as “aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations,” enacted through a process

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<sup>12</sup> Visitors to Angola are not permitted to carry cameras, video/audio recorders, or cellular phones; additionally, the only textual material distributed or posted at the event is the Rodeo Program Guide.

of four stages: 1) A *breach* of norm-governed social relations occurs; 2) A *crisis* phase where representatives of order (including citizens) are dared to grapple with the breach; 3) A phase of *redressive action* ranges from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery; and 4) A phase of *reintegration* of the disturbed social group occurs or recognition and legitimation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties occurs.<sup>13</sup> Turner’s matrix has “crime” written all over it; an individual enacts a *breach* of a social rule (breaks the law); the breach is addressed and the *crisis* is made public (a trial is conducted); if found guilty, *redressive action* is taken (the offender is sentenced to a period of punishment/rehabilitation); and finally, depending on the success or failure of redress, either the offender is accepted back into the community (parole/probation) or continues to be shunned (incarcerated).

In contemporary culture, the public phases of crime—arrest and trial—are played out in various degrees in the media (print, on-line and/or televised), depending on the “celebrity” of the crime or the individuals involved. Non-incarcerated citizens are permitted access, via technology, to many aspects of the first half of the criminal process. The second half of the equation—*redressive action* and *reintegration*—are more secretive events; at the rodeo and crafts fair they are on display. In the everyday lives of non-incarcerated citizens the prison system is geographically and ideologically removed. In contrast, reports of crime/criminal activity and the judicial process consume disproportionate amounts of space in the media landscape. The Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair challenges the secrecy of the latter phases of the social drama by permitting non-incarcerated citizens access to the phases of *redressive action* and *reintegration*. As such, the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair provides a relatively unique experience because it offers an opportunity to engage a critical ethnographic study of the phases of *redressive action* and *reintegration*.

This study attempts to practice what Nick Trujillo contends is the task of critical ethnography, “to uncover the power relations which influence how various people, including researchers, interpret culture”.<sup>14</sup> Following McCall and Becker’s mandate that “ethnography must be consciously ideological” this study addresses the ideological struggles over meanings that emerge from the experiences of tourists at Angola, such as: how do issues of “freedom”, “discipline” and “justice”, get represented in the performance of the rodeo and crafts fair.<sup>15</sup> Because mediated representations, such as the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair, play an important role in the penal education of currently non-incarcerated citizens, understanding the range of meanings that emerge from this experience might provide insight into the reasons why non-incarcerated citizens remain relatively silent about the exponential

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<sup>13</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. (Edison, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 1969), p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Nick Trujillo, ‘Interpreting November 22: A Critical Ethnography of an Assassination Site’. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 79 (1993), p. 449.

<sup>15</sup> Michal M. McCall and Howard S. Becker. *Symbolic Interaction and Cultural Studies*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 9.

and unprecedented growth of the U.S. prison system. I traveled to Louisiana to situate myself in the story of the prison system that is staged during the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair. I continued to return to the event because I wanted to ask questions about the meaning(s) of this event for tourists (non-incarcerated citizens) and how the event supported or challenged what they knew about the prison system in the United States.

It made sense to approach the rodeo and crafts fair, as cultural events, through the lens of performance studies. As a project of critical (ethnographic) investigation there are clear connections between ethnographic methodologies and theories of performance. I draw from Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* to create a framework for the study of the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair as a project of critical ethnography and performance studies. Taylor's work brings recognition to the value of embodied practice as a process of transmitting meaning and shaping cultural knowledge. In contrast to the written "archive," the performance or *repertoire*, in Taylor's work, is the site where "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission".<sup>16</sup> Taylor argues that the *repertoire*—performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, and singing—although devalued in Western culture, has as much power to shape cultural knowledge as the text-based *archive*. Because the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair is almost completely absent of archival resources, the experience of the tourist and the efficacy of the performance rely solely on the repertoire.<sup>17</sup> Taylor's privileging of the repertoire over the archive, although debatable,<sup>18</sup> is well-situated as a framework to understand an event such as the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair. Similar to Dwight Conquergood's contention that "performance is a site of struggle where competing interests intersect, and different viewpoints and voices get articulated," Taylor's understanding of repertoire performance is based in the relationship between knowledge and presence and the struggle over meaning that occurs in the process of "being there".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Diane Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor provides the following six steps for the study of a scenario: 1. Conjure the physical location. 2. Describe the actions and appearance of the social actors in a particular space. 3. Describe the "frame" of the event, most often which is fixed and predictable, often drawing from a historical context. 4. In the transmission of the scenario various modes can be used including: writing, telling, reenactment, mime, gesture, dance, or singing. 5. Enact reflexivity to situate ourselves in relation to the scenario. 6. Resist allowing the scenario to be purely mimetic. An extended discussion of the six-step process Taylor describes can be found in Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin D. Powell and Tracy T. Shaffer, 'On the Haunting of Performance Studies'. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 5 (2009), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Dwight Conquergood, D., 'Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology'. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 9 (1989), p. 84.; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The*

Taylor contends that it is through an investigation of the *scenario*, a term explicitly linked to *theatricality*, that it is possible to begin to see the “socially agreed upon plot line that underscores popular myths and cultural lore,” which is innate to any culture. Theatricality, in this context, Taylor suggests, reflects the “constructed, all-encompassing sense of performance”.<sup>20</sup> Taylor focuses on the “theatricality” of an event as a way to—relying on the work of Guy Debord in *Society of the Spectacle*—“highlight the *mechanics* of spectacle” that frame any public performance. This essay demonstrates, through the reflections of tourists and my own participant-observation, that the performance showcased at the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair is rooted in a particular performance of the spectacle of discipline. As defined by Debord, the spectacle is not an image—although it does have visual qualities—but a “social relation among people, represented by images;” the spectacle serves as a unifying force, often serving as a point of reference for individuals as they form an understanding of their culture.<sup>21</sup> In other words, spectacle is not simply a form of entertainment; the spectacle influences how individuals see themselves, and how they experience the world around them. In the context of the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair, the spectacular presentation of discipline staged for tourists contributes to the shaping of a collective consciousness about the experience of incarceration in the United States. The spectacle serves to mediate the relationship between individuals and contributes to the identity formation of “me” and “not-me.” At the rodeo and crafts fair the incarcerated men play the traditional role of the dangerous “other;” the tourists are the law-abiding judge and jury.

In order to fully account for the workings of the scenario (repertoire performance) Taylor provides a six step process of cultural investigation; the task is to “recall, recount, or reactivate” the scenario, to “wrestle with social constructions” in order to “understand the framework” that supports the meaning of an experience. The end goal is to “transmit” the scenario through “writing, telling, reenactment, mime, gesture, dance, and singing”.<sup>22</sup> I settle upon a combination of textual and multimedia representation for this essay; mime, gesture, dance, and singing are beyond my skill set. Taylor’s guidelines are the map I use to approach a study of the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair; this approach provides a sense of security as I venture into an unknown performance space. Throughout my experience I make an effort to treat every encounter with tourists, currently incarcerated men and prison employees as an opportunity to experience and witness the meaning-making process that occurs as a result our collective participation in the performance. My effort in this essay is to avoid simply “translating” the experience and instead to draw upon my

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*Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle.* (Detroit: Black and Red Press, 1967). Para 4.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 27.

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sensory observations, by reporting upon the sights, sounds, smells, and texture of the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair.

**10:00 a.m.**

Standing just a few feet inside the area of the prison that is fenced off and designated for the event, I smell skewered meat and sugar-coated treats on a stick and the competing odors of livestock. The event smells familiar. Although I have lived in Salt Lake City for more than five years, I vividly remember the state fairs I attended while living in Florida; this event has the same look, feel, and smell of a state fair. The Angola Rodeo and Crafts Fair seamlessly transforms the grounds of the prison into a space of tourism—a public spectacle—and site of surveillance.

A woman standing next to me at the entrance, who looks to be in her mid-thirties, quickly confesses that she feels a bit “intimidated and uneasy;” later, in an email correspondence, Nancy tells me that her initial feelings “faded fairly quickly, and then it was just like any old state fair.” As we continue to share our thoughts about the event over a series of emails, as I do with nineteen other individuals I meet during my visits, she tells me that the event was “[n]othing like I imagined. It is a family event, for good or bad.” Nancy was hesitant to bring her two small children to the crafts fair and rodeo. She was unsure that it was an appropriate (read: safe) venue; a few friends convinced her to attend. A personal encounter with crime or the criminal justice system is not often sought out in the form of an embodied experience; most intentional experiences with crime are mediated through literature, television, news media, and film.

Nancy’s initial resistance to attending the rodeo and crafts fair was dictated by fear and her imagination of the prison system. Two hours before my conversation with Nancy, sitting in my rental car at the gates of the prison, I too had no idea what to expect of this experience. I was following the suggestion of a friend who thought that I would be interested in what was happening at the prison. I was compelled to make the trip to Louisiana for the same reason that almost discouraged Nancy; I wanted to have a personal encounter with the prison system, and I was fascinated by the idea that a backstage experience with the prison system could occur through tourism.

Before continuing deeper into the belly of the event, I stopped a few more tourists to talk about the reasons they traveled to Angola. I met a newly married couple from New Orleans who were making their second visit to the event; a sophomore at LSU; a retired couple from St. Francisville, LA, both were dressed for the event: wearing cowboy hats and snap-button shirts; and a freshman in high school who admitted that originally her mom had to “drag” her to the event—her attitude appeared to change by the time she spoke with me:

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Visitor #1 - Um, this is only my second time coming, and uh, the first time I—the weather was really bad, so we wanted to come see it in good weather. It’s just something different. Only Louisiana.

Visitor #2 - The crafts and the food, I love [laughter] I talk to everybody about that [laughter].

Visitor #3 - Uh, I came and, uh, visited uh, with my school for um, a field trip.

Visitor #4 - We like rodeos, and this is the closest, and the only rodeo that we’re able to go to.

Visitor #5 - ‘Cause it’s interesting. It’s prisoners ridin’ bulls and stuff.

After spending some time at the entrance to the crafts fair I decide upon a methodical plan of attack; I would begin with the perimeter and work my way into the center of the event. The early morning mist rolling off of the Mississippi River and intermittent rain slow the crowds, but by noon it will too noisy for recording interviews. While the prison grounds are still relatively empty I want to talk with some of the men.

As I begin to weave my way through the tables of hobby crafts, leatherwork, paintings, and jewelry, and rows of indoor and outdoor furniture, I begin to sense the rhythm of the event. I start to move as though I know where to go next. One of the keys to staging a tourist attraction is to make the space legible. Because visitors to a tourist attraction only spend a fleeting amount of time in the space there a direct correlation exists between function and experience. A depoliticizing effect results from familiarity. The staging of the crafts fair, impersonating a state fair or carnival, relieves the tourist of the responsibility of experiencing the prison as a part of the architecture of discipline in the United States. Little critical reflection is required when the aesthetic of the prison mirrors a popular tourist attraction like a state fair or a public exhibition. Barbara Krishenblatt-Gimblett has shown that the tourist experience is generally staged similar to a museum, in which tourists are able to—in a familiar setting—reinforce what they already think they know about the world.<sup>23</sup> The design of the event, like all other functions of the prison, is overseen by warden Burl Cain.

### **Warden Burl Cain**

As the moral and spiritual epicenter of the Louisiana State Penitentiary since 1995, Cain’s innovative approach to running the prison has garnered national and international attention. Cain’s “rehabilitation” philosophy of redemption through

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Krishenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 7.

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religion has become a model for other prisons throughout the South and is the subject of Dennis Shere's book *Cain's Redemption* (2005). Cain's philosophy of prison management is infused with a religious dogmatism where faith equals redemption and precedes reintegration. The warden's appearance fits his name. Burl Cain is a tough man with a robust presence. He is not the "Hollywood" warden depicted in films such as: *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), *Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *Murder in the First* (1995), or *The Green Mile* (1999). These wardens are meek and bookish. Warden Cain exudes command and control. His presence demands attention. Warden Cain believes that four things make for a sound prison: "good playing, good praying, good food, and good medicine".<sup>24</sup> The rodeo and crafts fair is good playing (and good food). Steeped in a rhetoric of rehabilitation and redemption, Warden Cain oversees the production, presentation and performance of the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair; his influence is present as I spoke with the men he oversees.

### 10:30 a.m.

Bruce and Emille, both white men in their mid-fifties, are trustees at Angola.<sup>25</sup> Their table is on the outskirts of the event. The men stand against portable fencing erected to form a perimeter which separates the festival from the "functioning" prison.<sup>26</sup> Their table is covered with handcrafted wooden bowls, cups and other containers. Bruce is quick to agree to allow me to make a photograph of him and his craft adorned with a blue ribbon, and tells me about the process of entering "hobbycrafts" into a competition where "hobbycrafts" are evaluated and judged by prison staff and "expert" guest judges. Given the slow start to the day I have plenty of time to explain my project, answer a few of Bruce and Emille's questions, and ask some of my own.

Bruce and Emille have more than forty years of combined experience with the crafts fair, they were both young men when they arrived at Angola, and both will, most likely, live out the remainder of their lives here. As we talk there is both resignation and resolve in their voices; it is clear that the crafts fair serves a practical and ideological purpose for both men. The crafts fair provides a needed financial resource; the men will earn money to keep and some to send home to the family members on whom they usually depend for financial and emotional support. Throughout the day I hear a number of men explain to potential customers that the money they make will be sent back to family members. They often mention their

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Dobie, "The Alcatraz of the South: Inside Angola, the Nation's Largest Maximum Security Prison". *Newsday.com*. 18 July 2004. <http://www.newsday.com/sports/ny-pris2-side1,0,2969588.story>. n.p.

<sup>25</sup> In order to gain trustee status an individual must have been at Angola for over fifteen years without having committed a "major infraction". Trustees are granted the most access and privileges on a daily basis at the prison and during the rodeo and crafts fair.

<sup>26</sup> A quarter of the 5,000 men incarcerated at the prison participate in the rodeo and/or crafts fair.

children. The logic of their rhetoric is clearly structured to discourage the thought that money might be going to cigarettes, drugs, alcohol or other prison "contraband." The men seem to be aware that part of their role is to counterbalance the images, guided by television, film and the news media, which loom in the subconscious of the lay attendee. In addition to the immediate, or short-term gains—social and economic, Bruce describes what he considers the more significant contribution of the event:

Mary: Because so many people come here, what would you like them to take away from this experience?

Bruce: Basically, just uh, uh a better, or more informed, uh, opinion of inmates. We are people, we, we were people before we were arrested. We're dehumanized once we're convicted. I would like to see people be a little more open, or a little less suspicious, if you will. They, they all walk in, they figure everybody's trying to run a game on 'em, and it's, it's not, it's not like that. Inmates are out here and, and most of 'em are out here for the right reasons, and they're trying to, you know, make a little, little something to get them through the next however long it's gonna take 'em.

Trustees of the prison, men who have little hope of leaving the prison, have either resigned or become committed to making Angola their home. "The Warden tells us it's our responsibility to make sure there are no problems at the event, we know it's all over if there is." Bruce clearly conveys the importance of control at the event. The trustees serve as mediators between the "free" and incarcerated world, and they appear to do their best to present a positive image of prison life. Repeatedly throughout the day I am greeted by smiling faces followed by "hello ma'am" or "hi, young lady." The men are friendly and seem aware of their responsibility in the performance.

Emille, who is currently serving the twenty-sixth year of a life sentence at Angola, has also learned to speak the language of the warden. I asked him what he thought tourists should learn from their experience. He tells me about the freedom he has on the grounds of the prison. He does not escape, even though his job involves driving outside the prison gates. Emille wants to go home, and believes that reintegration is possible, despite his life sentence. Emille was one of the few men I met who spoke about life after Angola and credits the warden for his positive attitude. After speaking with Emille I get the sense that his resilience is innate to who he is. Like Bruce, Emille understands that there is significant work to be done to challenge the public opinion about prisoner, which is why he thinks the crafts fair and rodeo should be an international event. He believes the event can have a positive effect:

Emille: I would say it's—it's a great opportunity because the public actually get to come to see the people that they say are animals. If it was up to me, I'd advertise it throughout the world, to get more people to come here, because they are really surprised when they come in and say well, you're trusted—yeah—well how much time ya got? I got life, I been here twenty-

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six years, I work outside the gate, I have a supervisor that checks on me, you know—w-what's stoppin' you from runnin' away? A lot. One day, I wanna go home, in my mind, I wanna keep it to where I am gonna go home, you can't change it, the Warden has gave us a lot of opportunities here to show to the public that we are able to go out and function as an individual, not a criminal.

Emille has learned well and is a model prisoner, an important sign of a “good prison.” Visitors I spoke with were less sympathetic in their perspectives on the event, specifically when asked about the incarcerated men they met during the event. After a day at Angola and given time at home to reflect on her experience, Angela, a visitor to the event, when asked about her interactions with the men, inadvertently describes to me the process she engaged to reconcile her experience. She begins with a short-lived display of sympathy: “It is easy to feel sorry for them when one sees all the security and the double/triple barbed wire fences,” but, in the same sentence, provides a counter argument to her initial impression: “however, one only has to remember why those guys are there, and then one doesn't feel so sorry for them. They are some of the worst, most dangerous criminals in the state of Louisiana, and they are in prison for a reason.”

Although it is clear that Angela's visit to the prison caused her to pause and momentarily think about the damages of incarceration, the conclusions she draws do little to suggest a change in her beliefs. “But, it seems like this event demonstrates the potential for rehabilitation. Here we are, spending the day inside a prison, with men incarcerated in a maximum-security facility, and it was a very safe experience. Do you think that the event demonstrates the possibility of rehabilitation?” I write back to Angela. A day later I receive another email. Angela writes,

I think that if they [inmates] behave 'inside' they deserve a reward like the rodeo and crafts sale. It humanizes things for them and gives them an incentive to behave. It did make me think more about what causes people to become criminals, but the fact is, they broke our state's laws and hurt people (victims) and/or their families, and the prisoners deserve to be in prison. It is sad for everyone all around.

Our conversation volleys back and forth for a few more rounds, but Angela concedes little ground when it comes to the issue of reintegration, as she is content only viewing the event as a particular form of rehabilitation. In her response, Angela speaks the voice of the status quo and her comments are representative of what I argue is the desired outcome of the event. Angela values this event because it displays the success of the prison system—disciplining offenders—and she is able to witness this success during the rodeo and crafts fair. But, the presentation of “well-behaved inmates” does not mean they deserve to be released from prison, only that they deserve a reward for good behavior. The prison sentence seems to be a non-negotiable factor in her worldview; it is simply the matter-of-fact result of “choosing”

to engage in criminal behavior. Although she asks, “what causes people to be criminals?” Angela stops short of engaging her own critical inquiry, and simply resorts to: “they broke the law and hurt people.” In a follow-up email I ask Angela about systemic causes of crime, but we never fully engage this conversation.

Bruce and Emille suggest that the short-term gains of selling items and making a profit pale in comparison to the long-term ideological change and shifts in attitudes toward the prison system that they hope will result from the event. What becomes evident during the event, and in conversation with visitors after returning home is that lasting systemic and/or philosophical changes that could occur at the level of “reentry” or the fourth phase of Turners dramaturgical matrix are unlikely. For many visitors to Angola, the warden’s rhetoric of “reform and redemption” is convincing. The warden is able to convince visitors of the success of *his* prison through the presentation of *his* well-behaved men. The men incarcerated at Angola do not attempt escape or cause trouble, as Bruce and Emille point out, because resistant drama is not part of the script. The power of the state to punish is the most prominent item put on display at the crafts fair where docile (read: effectively disciplined) bodies are permitted to interact with the public under limited supervision. Throughout the day I meet dozens of men who play the role of the “good inmate.” Certainly, it is to their advantage to embody the performance.

**11:30 a.m.**

At the crafts fair negativity toward the prison system does not sell, but satire does. A popular hobbycraft at the event is the “Angola State Bird Birdhouse”—a small rectangular box painted with black and white stripes and fitted with a bird perch. The men selling these items make them because they are both popular, providing guaranteed income, and easy to construct in the prison’s wood shop.<sup>27</sup> The event is relatively absent of art that is critical of the reality of prison life. Many of the men use humor and curiosity as a tool to diffuse any anxiety that tourists might have about approaching them and their work. While the financial benefits of the event are significant, the social capital associated with human interaction is a valuable commodity.

The tactic of engaging potential customers through curiosity was most evident in the work of Kenwood who deals in matchstick art—a classic type of “prison art.” When I met Kenwood he was displaying a replica of the Challenger Space Shuttle built from 10,120 burned matchsticks. The item has a \$500.00 price tag and although there are few “buyers” around his table, he is surrounded by spectators. Standing at the corner of the folding table that holds five other original designs, Kenwood tells

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<sup>27</sup> The men participating in the crafts fair must finance their participation and purchase all the needed supplies for their artwork and crafts. The men I spoke with told me most of their profits were sent home to their families and they only keep what they need for craft and personal supplies.

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me “I’d be very happy to sell this piece,” with a big grin on his face—I realize that he misunderstands my status as a graduate student for that of a professor. “It would look great in an office” Kenwood is still grinning, “I’m a poor graduate student” I quickly respond; we both laugh. Kenwood quickly follows by telling me that he enjoys “meeting the people ... and getting a chance to talk to people from the free world.” He knows that his artwork will always draw a big crowd; his is some of the most intricate work I have seen at the event. Kenwood adds that he has a collector in Houston, Texas who purchases his work and also helps him sell his inventory after the crafts fair season ends. In a letter he asks me to send him any pictures that I have of his art; he wants to give them to his collector for her website.<sup>28</sup> I send Kenwood all the images I have, including the picture I made of the Challenge Space Shuttle on October 22, 2006.

A year later I see Kenwood again. At Angola, one can count on consistency. Kenwood is standing at the same station, in the same location as the year before. His table is steps away from the entrance to the main hobbycraft area; Kenwood and his crafts get a lot of attention. This year Kenwood is displaying his latest creation, a Green Giant Helicopter. I walk over to his table and without a greeting, I lead with: “that’s quite an accomplishment, Kenwood,” he smiles suggesting that he remembers my face, responding with “11,756 matchsticks.” We exchange greetings and a handshake and then begin talking about the items on his table. “I sold the Challenger at the October 28, 2006 rodeo,” he says. “I missed it by a week, I wish I was there,” I tell him. “You’ll be interested in this,” he replies. The guy had me write ‘Angola 2006’ on the bottom; remember how I told you everyone wants something from Angola?” A year earlier, as well as in our written correspondences, Kenwood and I discussed the tourist’s desire for an “authentic experience” and how the “reality” of their visit is represented through a piece of prison art. Jim, another “trustee” at Angola, and I had a very similar conversation. Jim also told me a story about the tourist’s desire to authenticate their experience. Standing among rows of oil paintings, Jim’s preferred craft, I ask him how he decides what to paint. As I look at the rows of swamp and hunting scenes, I get the sense that Jim is playing to a traditional southern audience. I ask Jim about “prison imagery”—artwork reflecting the experience of being incarcerated—and he offers a story about a piece that he painted a few years ago:

Mary: What about prison images? Like, paintings that depict either elements of [Jim - yeah] prison life [Jim - yeah] or imagery, how do those do?

Jim: As long as they have Angola on ‘em, they—they sell pretty good. I’m a give ya an example of prison stuff—I had a painting that I tried to sell for three years, and it wouldn’t sell, and a friend of mine said, “Put a sign”—it,

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<sup>28</sup> Kenwood and I exchange letters for about two years; the first letter arrived in November 2006 and our last correspondence occurred in January 2008. As far as I know there was not an incident or reason for our correspondences to end. My last letter to Kenwood was postmarked January 23, 2008.

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it was a road, it was a rural scene with a—with a road and a overpass. He said, “Put a sign right there says ‘Angola, twenty-two miles.’” And I put Angola is twenty-two miles on it, little sign, that’s all I did, and sold it the first day I set it out. You know, ooh! It’s got Angola on it. And they just like that. People just like to buy Angola. If—if it’s got Angola written on it, it seems to sell.

Kenwood and Jim’s experiences demonstrate the tourist’s desire to authenticate the experience of visiting Angola; an experience that is unusual, but not one that is packaged to be taken beyond the gates of the prison. The performance at Angola, as is the case with all embodied (repertoire) performances, is ephemeral and survives only in the memory of the tourist. Solely relying on the memory of an experience is antithetical to the contemporary model of tourism where the expectation is that objects will outlive memories. Because tourists are not permitted to make photographs or capture moving images of the experience, the objects purchased and the memory of the event are the only souvenirs possible. Material objects, as Benjamin observes, become the representation of history. Borrowing from Marcel Proust, Benjamin writes, “the past is somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object”.<sup>29</sup> The absence of photograph, which is most often cited as the process that makes the greatest contribution to the decline of the “aura”—the unique quality of an original artistic piece, serves to invest the hobbycrafts the men sell with a greater level of value and authenticity. The success of the crafts fair is predicated upon the “inmate-artists” ability to capitalize on the tourist’s desire to memorialize their experience through the purchase of a commodity item.

**12:00 p.m.**

In addition to selling hobbycrafts and souvenirs prison organizations make and sell concessions. For example, the “Hook and Ladder Club” sells beans and rice and cotton candy; the “Methodist Men,” fresh roasted peanuts; “Camp J Unity Club,” lemonade; and the “Full Gospel Business Men,” chicken wings, shrimp etoufée and kabobs. All proceeds from the rodeo are directed back to the prison community (including individuals) or the surrounding community. For many of the men incarcerated at Angola, the crafts fair is their primary source of income. A daily wage at Angola is somewhere between \$0.04 and \$1.00 for working at the prison. The funds from ticket sales are put into the Inmate Welfare Fund, which supports rehabilitative, educational, and recreational programs at the prison.

For lunch I order the seafood plate from the “Full Gospel Businessmen;” although there is little time to talk with the men serving food, I am intrigued by the idea of a religious order of businessmen, so I ask a few questions. Richard tells me

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* in Hannah Arendt (ed) and Harry Zohn (trans) (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 158.

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that the group is “a Christian ministry” that provides outreach, rehabilitation, and religious services in the prison. In an effort to not occupy any more time at the height of the lunch rush I take my lunch and find a space on a nearby bench. Fifty yards away is the section of the event designated for children. Watching groups of children playing and being entertained by games and rides, and trying to reconcile my own understanding of this experience, I think about Michel Foucault. Not surprisingly, I often find myself thinking about Foucault during my visits to Angola; I think about walking with him and talking about the transformation of the spectacle and contemporary forms of discipline. As I watch a trustee lift a young boy and place him on a pony ride I contemplate the tension between the privatization of discipline and the public nature of the rodeo and crafts fair.

Central to Foucault’s work in *Discipline and Punish* was the notion that as punishment moved from the public sphere to the prison. Punishment became less spectacular as a public ritual, making the transition to an act of surveillance, and more specifically to enacting individualized and privatized discipline on the body of the incarcerated. Reviewing the history of discipline, Foucault announced the death of the spectacle at the moment the scaffold (public execution) was replaced by the prison (private discipline). As Foucault notes, “in the ceremonies of the public execution, the main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance”.<sup>30</sup> When the scaffold was taken from the town square, discipline was no longer a visual act of public participation and ceased to be a disciplinary act imparted upon the social body. Foucault writes of the banality of the transformation of discipline:

Meanwhile the newspapers took over the task of recounting the grey, unheroic details of everyday crime and punishment. The split was complete; the people was robbed of its old pride in its crimes; the great murders had become the quiet game of the well behaved.<sup>31</sup>

The Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair restores the audience to their rightful place in the performance of discipline. As a return to public discipline, the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair provides a particularly rich opportunity to examine the relationship between spectacle and surveillance in a contemporary culture where the boundaries between the “inside” and “outside” of the prison are not as rigid as once envisioned. Rather than surveillance and spectacle being distinct, as Foucault suggested, I follow more closely Jonathan Crary’s assertion that the spectacle and surveillance have become integrated, suggesting that in a contemporary culture “both surveillance and the spectacle are a set of techniques for the management of bodies”.<sup>32</sup> Crary’s writing emerges from a tradition of scholarship proposing

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans), (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*.

alternatives to the necessary separation between Foucault’s surveillance and Debord’s spectacle.

Additionally, in the writings of Tony Bennett it is possible to find another alternative to Foucault’s pronouncement of the death of the spectacle. Bennett’s “exhibitionary complex” is specifically relevant to the Angola Rodeo and Crafts Fair. Bennett demonstrates how “technologies of surveillance” became linked with “new forms of spectacle,” enacted in public forums, that produced a new form of control enacted upon a viewing public.<sup>33</sup> Bennett’s exhibitionary complex could be found in museums, amusement parks, world’s fairs and other public exhibitions where “things and people” were arranged for the observation and inspections of an audience.<sup>34</sup> The public display of bodies, as objects to collect, organize and display, was a demonstration of power. Drawing upon Foucault’s framework of power/knowledge, Bennett traces, in an archeological project similar to Foucault’s, the power inherent in exhibitions as “vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power ... throughout society,” rendering the “objects” as spectacle.<sup>35</sup> Bennett saw the achievement of power and control most evident in the large public exhibitions occurring throughout Europe in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries where objects—people and things—were brought from around the world to be put on display for an eager audience. The result of the exhibitionary complex was the formation of a “strategic system of representation” where the object, set in a public arena, became the center point of observation, through the gaze of the spectator.<sup>36</sup> The public exhibit returned the disciplinary gaze to the public landscape. The most clear demonstration of the exhibitionary complex at the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair occurs in the area where non-trustees sell arts and crafts; the space where most of the incarcerated men who participate in the event conduct business.<sup>37</sup>

**1:00 p.m.**

The non-trustee section was described to me by one tourist as “the place where inmates did the leering and other less civil things.” In this area tables are neatly arranged along a towering chain-link fence. On the other side, men line up side by side, watching closely as potential customers pick among their products. Because of the distance between the artists and the consumers, “cat-calls” are the primary mode of communication. Many tourists admitted to me that the space felt “aggressive” and

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(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Trustees are the only men permitted to have a stand/table at the crafts fair where direct interaction with tourists is possible. Because there are fewer trustees within the prison, a disproportionate amount of men sell from behind the fence.

“intimidating,” especially when contrasted with the area where trustees sell their crafts. For Cynthia, a first-time tourist at the event, this section made the experience more authentic. As we stood on the outskirts of the non-trustee area we had a brief conversation. “How do you feel about spending the day on the grounds of a prison,” I ask. She takes a moment and responds, “I understand that there are some safety precautions that must be taken when you are at a maximum security prison. I wish these safety measures, you know, the guards and fences, wouldn’t have been so apparent.” Quickly, she continues: “But, then again, this constant reminder makes it more real—’un-Disney-like.’” I nod my head showing that I agree with her, “it sure isn’t Disney,” I say and before I can respond further Cynthia, along with her husband, whom she introduced me to moments before we began talking, begin to head in the direction of a man selling wooden outdoor furniture. Our conversation ends here.

If there were any guilt associated with the experience of being a tourist at a prison, the non-trustee area would be a likely place for it to be exhibited. The divisions between “freedom” and “incarceration” or the “inside” and “outside” world are so clearly marked in the non-trustee section. This is the place that a tourist might question the practices of mass incarceration as they come face-to-face, through the physical division of the fencing erected for the event, with the reality of imprisonment. In my conversations with tourists, as exemplified by an exchange with Cynthia, I did not find that guilt shadowed the experiences. Fear and uncertainty played a more significant role. I observed many tourists attempting to avoid eye contact with the men and their objects as they quickly moved through the non-trustee area. As Emmanuel Levinas reminds, sharing eye contact (gazing into the eyes of another) forms a bond or sense of responsibility between the two individuals. A shared gaze, in the spirit of Martin Buber’s pronouncement of the I-Thou relation, is not the experience of the tourist or the incarcerated.

The non-trustee area best reveals the desperation of the prison system. In the space where the exotic “other,” standing behind a fence, is put on display, marks the bodies as objects to be viewed and made meaningful by the gaze of the tourist.<sup>38</sup> Margaret Olin contends that the gaze encompasses issues of desire and control, “the desire for self-completion through another” and the desire to be “the master of the gaze”.<sup>39</sup> In the space where non-trustee artists sell crafts the tourist is also subject of the gaze. Here, tourists *and* the incarcerated men are both on display. The men behind the fence see “freedom,” in the form of the tourist’s mobility, moving before their eyes. The non-trustee is the embodiment of discipline, presented as a spectacle and object of surveillance for the gazing tourist. The power in this visual exchange resides with the tourist who is free to leave the space and to not return the gaze. The space where the non-trustees sell crafts is the “battleground” of the gaze that Jean-Paul

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<sup>38</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Olin, ‘Gaze’ in Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds), *Critical Terms for Art History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 325.

Sartre describes as the place where the self is defined and redefined.<sup>40</sup> As the incarcerated men and tourists exchange gazes, the freedom of the non-incarcerated visitor is confirmed at the same time that the confinement of the incarcerated men is reinforced. Like the third world bodies that spectators and academics traveled to gaze upon, the incarcerated (trustee and non-trustee) body is the object of the gaze because they are viewed as exotic by the tourist and as a result appear timeless, apolitical and absent of a personal history. The non-trustee area leaves little doubt about who is "free" and who is incarcerated.

In the theater of the Angola Rodeo and Crafts Fair the men behind the fence are props used to illustrate success and failure. Tourists visually witness the successful "rehabilitation" that occurs at Angola when they experience the non-trustee behind the fence juxtaposed with the mild-mannered and polite trustees that require limited supervision. The non-trustees perform the role of the "dangerous criminal" and reinforce the idea of a hierarchy within the prison system. The trustees are positioned as refined in comparison to the non-trustees. The trustee/non-trustee dyad not only serves a function in the penal education of the tourists, it also has an effect on the incarcerated men (trustees and non-trustees). The non-trustees, from behind the fence, face, literally and figuratively, the perceived freedom of the trustees. The trustees remain within eyesight, yet out of reach for the non-trustees. For the trustees the non-trustee stands in the periphery as a constant reminder of where they once stood.

Many of the trustees I spoke with remember their days behind the fence. Emille tells me that his time selling from behind the fence was not as lucrative as it is now that he is a trustee. Looking in the direction of a large row of non-trustees, he tells me, "Behind the razor wire I cannot talk to people. I have to holler at them through the fence to make a sale. They [tourists] look at us like 'man, they're behind the fence. What are they? Why are they there? Why are the other inmates over here?'" Jim, who is also a trustee, has a similar impression of the men behind the fence, but he also has the empathy that the tourists lack. As he stands at his table which is in close proximity and clear sight of the non-trustee area, he tells me about the difference between the men behind the fence and himself:

Jim: Well, as I told ya yesterday, people'll come in here and they're lookin' at them guys like—least those animals are tied up behind the fence—the lesser animals like us, the trustees, are out here, you know, they're—must not be as bad, but that's not necessarily true, it's because I been here for twenty-three years and they've been here—most of them haven't been here near that long and haven't got the opportunity or made trustee. It doesn't mean they're bad guys, they're just—they haven't made trustee yet. They're stuck behind the fence and I get to come out. But I guess after they do twenty-three years hopefully [laughter] they'll be out here.

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<sup>40</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 110.

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Though it would be beneficial to the tourist, sharing Jim's insights would break the frame of the performance of the "controlled" versus the "dangerous" body. By exhibiting tamed and controlled men positioned against a backdrop of men still deserving discipline, the warden shows rehabilitation is working for some men, but not to the extent that reintegration is possible. Jim also reflects the resignation I heard in the voices of many other men incarcerated at Angola when he suggests that the best a man can do is hope to be on the other side of the fence in 23 years. The civility of "well-mannered inmate" on display for public consumption is a theme that carries throughout the crafts fair; the rodeo, on the other hand, offers up the bodies of the incarcerated in the timeless performance of public discipline. Humanity is lost in the second half of the day when "Inmate Cowboys" perform to the cheers and amusement of the rodeo audience.

**2:00 p.m.**

The inmates know that if they were to act up and mess up and cause something to happen during the rodeo, then I wouldn't have the rodeo. And so, therefore, there's tremendous peer pressure to bring out the best behavior in everyone. And we don't have any incidences. We won't have any problems today. No one will try to leave, and everything's gonna be peaches. We're gonna have a good rodeo, and you'll see the inmates be very well behaved. It's a safe prison. It's as safe here as any street in New Orleans. Now, y'all ready to go have a rodeo?

Warden Burl Cain<sup>41</sup>

The April 21, 2007 rodeo begins with a performance by the "Glory Riders," the only horseback-mounted Christian Ministry in the United States. According to the group's website, the Glory Riders "ride under the banner of Jesus Christ".<sup>42</sup> The self-proclaimed purpose of the group is to "share the love of God, His saving grace and mercy in the western tradition." The Glory Riders only add to a unique performance steeped in patriotism and religion, and enhance the appearance of an event designed upon the premise of morality, rehabilitation, and redemption. Often the phase of *redressive action* "involves a 'sacrifice' literal or moral".<sup>43</sup> The Glory Riders are part of the moral element necessary in the *redressive phase* of the social drama, the performance of the Glory Riders introduces the possibility of repair. The religious undercurrent guiding the event reflects the effort to portray a wholesome and moral image to the public. The righteous presentation also serves to prepare the audience for what comes next—the public sacrifice that must occur.

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<sup>41</sup> Warden Burl Cain at Pre-Rodeo Press Conference 2003. Quoted in: Melissa Schrift, 'The Angola Prison Rodeo: Inmate Cowboys and Institutional Tourism'. *Ethnology*, 43 (2009), p. 336.

<sup>42</sup> *The Glory Riders*. <http://www.gloryriders.org>.

<sup>43</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 71.

After a few of the introductions standard to a sporting event— acknowledgement of sponsors, the presentation of flags and the singing of the National Anthem—a stadium procession involving rodeo participants ends with warden Cain riding into the stadium in a chariot. The warden, a latter-day Caesar has entered the Coliseum. Two survey respondents equated this event, especially the opening ceremony, with an ancient ritual procession. When asked what he liked about his visit to the rodeo and crafts fair one visitor responded, "I was captivated when I walked into the arena ... I also got the feeling that I was watching Caesar's gladiator games, with Burl Cain playing Caesar and the inmates playing gladiators." It was this same "gladiator aesthetic" that caused another visitor to question if she would return next year; she was also one of the few tourists I spoke with who leveled a critique of the experience. She tells me,

I realize that these people are there for a reason, but it doesn't mean we need to use their pain as a spectator sport. This was like the Gladiator days when people were put in the arena with wild animals for the pleasure of the spectators. I think this should not be a tourist attraction at all. There was nothing attractive about it.

After circling the ring and being showered by the applause of the audience, the warden ascends to his perch atop the stadium and addresses the crowd. Cain's husky voice welcomes the audience and encourages them to "cheer the bravery of the inmates" as they "do battle in the ring." The warden's slow and deliberate drawl flows over the public address system of the stadium. The warden welcomes the spectator into the *redressive phase* of the social drama. The rodeo reintroduces public forms of punishment and invites the non-incarcerated citizen to serve as a witness of the power of the state. This event is a newly envisioned public spectacle and the rodeo arena becomes a modern variation of the public scaffold.

During the rodeo the audience witnesses a few men succeed, but most often watches them fail and suffer painful punishment. The audience cheers both the success and failure of the competitor; both entertain them. The audience is absolved of feeling sympathy for the inmates not only because they have committed crimes, but also because the punishment is couched in a language of sport and entertainment. Despite the warden's rhetoric of rehabilitation, a sub-plot of ridicule underwrites the rodeo's script. Throughout the rodeo, the "inmate cowboys" are presented as inept objects deserving of punishment. According to the Prison Rodeo Program for the October 2006 event, the unskilled inmate makes for "hilarious entertainment" where even the animals "mock the frustrated riders." Of course, even this humiliation is presented in a "rhetoric of redemption." Throughout the event the announcer cites the competitors' ability to "triumph" over adversity and "conquer" the competition.

At the prison rodeo, many traditional rodeo activities such as bareback horse riding, bull riding, calf roping, and barrel racing occur. The prison rodeo competition typically consists of ten events, a number of which have been designed especially for this spectacle. The names of some events imply a certain connection to the public

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fantasy of incarceration. Tourists view, “Bust Out,” “Down and Dirty,” and “Buddy Pick Up.” Each of these events reflects an image of barbaric, desperate, and sexualized incarcerated bodies put on display for a viewing audience. Anthropologist Melissa Schrift also found that the rodeo performance serves as “a forum for ... the public’s fascination with criminality” and that the event is set against a backdrop of “deeply ingrained racial and sexual codes, violence, and state authoritarianism”.<sup>44</sup> For example, “Buddy Pick Up” depicts a timeless escape fantasy, complete with a competitor in the role of the heroic leading man on horseback and a damsel in distress (played by another competitor). The romantic nature of the event is undeniable. First, the audience laughs as the two men attempt the escape, but as they successfully ride away together the stadium fills with cheers.

Visitors bear witness to the brutality of the rodeo on the bodies of the untrained participants, which for some is justifiable because it serves as punishment for the inmate’s crime. Like the scaffold, the rodeo physically disciplines inmates in the presence of a public acting as judge and jury. Tourists are invited to witness the violence in the ring as punishment for crime. “My mom feels bad about how rough the bull ride was for one of the prisoners,” a tourist tells me as we are leaving the event. She and her mother have always lived in Louisiana; she had attended the event once before, but at seventy-five this was her mother’s first visit. She continues, “my mother has a really soft heart for most people, but I reminded her that these prisoners had stole, sold drugs, raped, beaten and murdered people in order to get to prison.” At this point I hear the voice of another tourist, “these are the worst of the worst in Louisiana.” The voice of authority—the warden, the state, and the media—comes flowing out of the mouths of visitors as they police the boundaries of the experience. Not only is this visitor attempting to justify the prison system as a means to punish violent transgressors, she provides a rationale for the rodeo as a dangerous, yet cathartic event. Like the public executions of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, masses of spectators participate in the collective act of public discipline during the rodeo. The rodeo depicts a classic representation of the prison system where the violent offender in need of punishment is publicly beaten and subdued under the supervision of a stern, yet loving warden/father figure, all to the cheers of an adoring, and approving crowd.

#### **4:00 p.m. (Grand Finale)**

As the rodeo events continue throughout the afternoon the level of risk and danger increases. Two events most clearly reveal the spectacular nature of the prison rodeo as a form of public punishment. “Convict Poker” and “Guts and Glory” are the most popular events of the day. In “Guts and Glory” and “Convict Poker” participants check their rodeo skills at the ring’s gate, as both events only require a willingness to serve as a human sacrifice to the rodeo gods. In “Convict Poker,” four

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<sup>44</sup> Schrift, *The Angola Prison Rodeo*, p. 331.

men sit at a red table in red chair, in the center of the rodeo ring. Just after being seated a bull is released into the ring. As soon as the bucking and disoriented bull enters, it is taunted by the crowd and coaxed toward the table by four professional rodeo clowns. Their intention is clear, get the bull as close as possible to the table. The rules are simple, the last man sitting at the table—the one who can avoid either being gored or frightened into trying to run is declared the winner. Rounds of the “game” are played, as the table and chairs are filled with fresh bodies; the house generally emerges victorious. The crowd erupts into a mixture of cheers and laughter as men are discarded by the bull.

The final event of the day once again pits the will of the contestants against the sheer force of a bull. “Guts and Glory” does not require many, if any, rodeo skills. As the name of the event implies, it takes guts to win, and the man who is victorious walks away with all the glory—and up to \$500.00 in prize money.<sup>45</sup> The winner is the man who can tear away a chip that has been strapped to the head of a bull. The event is given a three-minute time limit. Regardless of who wins—a man or animal—the crowd celebrates every second of this last event. Few members of the audience remain in their seats.

Journalist Daniel Bergner, who spent more than a year at Angola interviewing currently incarcerated men, guards, and the warden, depicts the possibilities that emerge from the prison rodeo in *Gods of the Rodeo*. An exchange between Bergner and rodeo competitor Terry Hawkins illustrates the meaning of the rodeo to the men at Angola. In October 1996, Bergner stood in the crowd and watched Hawkins valiantly wrestle the red chip from the head of the bull. Hawkins was no stranger to the cheers of the spectators. He had won “Guts and Glory” in the past, an accomplishment he told Bergner, was “the best in his life.” When Bergner questioned if that included events in his life before Angola, Hawkins said “it did” and when he asked Hawkins if he could imagine anything better in the future, he simply said “no”.<sup>46</sup> In Terry Hawkins’ world, the prison rodeo is the site of his life’s greatest achievement.

I pay close attention to the announcer during my visit, I do not want to miss Terry Hawkins’ name projected over the loud speaker. As his name is announced Terry raises his arm and waves to the crowd; his red baseball cap makes it easy to follow during the event. Ironically, men at Angola historically wore red hats—known at the prison as “The Red Hats”—making them visible while working in tall fields throughout the prison. Guards on horseback could easily see and, if necessary, shoot at a man while working or fleeing the field. Terry is aggressive in his pursuit of the bull, more so than two-thirds of the twenty men in the ring who are hesitant to make

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<sup>45</sup> The winner of “Guts and Glory” and the man named “All-Around Cowboy” receive prizes. A five hundred dollar cash prize is given to the winner of “Guts and Glory” The winner of the entire competition receives a rodeo belt buckle. To be eligible for the coveted title of “All-Around Cowboy” a contestant must successfully complete the bull riding competition (eight seconds).

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Bergner, *God of the Rodeo: The Quest for Redemption in Louisiana’s Angola Prison*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), p. 15.

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a move toward the bull and instead appear to be content watching the action from a distance. Terry and three other men instinctively agree simultaneously lunge toward the muscular beast. Moments later, a man emerges from the scuffle with the red chip triumphantly raised above his head. The stadium exhales and erupts into cheers. Like a pitcher who had just thrown a no-hitter, the winner of the event is surrounded by fellow competitors and whisked up onto their shoulders for a victory lap around the rodeo ring. Terry Hawkins joins in the applause. He has not won this round, but he and the other men appear to all take a moment to bask in the “glory” of victory. Marking the end of another successful rodeo, the spontaneous celebration seamlessly transitions into a mass exodus. Although they have not stopped cheering, the spectators file out of the arena. Correctional officers signal that it is time for the men to return to the prison. The reality of life at Angola can only be suspended for so long.

### **5:00 p.m.**

It is evident that the pace of movement around me has quickened. The flow of bodies out of the prison is much less orderly and done with greater purpose than their entry into the stadium. While I spent the day following people as they drifted around the grounds of the prison, even running into a few as they stopped to browse a crafts table, the end of the rodeo marked the signal to “hurry up” and “move out of my way.” As dusk begins to settle on Angola it is clear that the intention of the thousands of tourists tightly packed into the rodeo stadium is to leave the grounds of the prison and head back to their lives “outside” of Angola’s walls. Tourists file out of the stadium through two main exits/entrances. At Angola, darkness is the curtain that signals the end of the performance.

### **Conclusion**

For more than forty years non-incarcerated citizens have crossed through the gates of the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola to participate in a spectacle of discipline. Each individual entering the United States’ largest and most controversial maximum-security prisons colludes in the transformation of the prison into a spectacular tourist attraction. Whether tourists travel to the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair to purchase “authentic” crafts, for the “entertainment” of a rodeo, or to see a prison or “prisoner,” voyeurism is undeniable. During the years I was a participant-observer at the event my own experiences crossed fluidly between researcher and voyeur. “Looking” is the day’s most popular event and I willingly participated. I watched tourists, incarcerated men, and employees, and I watched them watch each other and I watched them watch me. I participated in and observed the staging of an event that understands the role of the tourists as that of a pleasure-seeking traveler in search of souvenirs, concessions, entertainment and a unique experience. The script of the rodeo and crafts fair reads as a narrative intending to distract attention away from the

daily experience of incarceration, and, in effect, results in depoliticizing the experience of incarceration. As noted throughout the essay, the short-term gains, primarily for the incarcerated men and their families are undeniable—individual men earn money, the Inmate Welfare Fund gains significant contributions, and men spend the day talking with friends, family and visitors. In the shadow of the short-term gains are the long-term implications of the event. At the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair, the interactions between non-incarcerated and incarcerated persons happen at a great and unacceptable social cost. As a public spectacle, the event joins a long list of reform-designated programs that expand and deepen the penal crisis. Despite the rhetoric of ambitious intentions, the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair prioritizes the short-term financial gains of the men, their families and the prison and the entertainment of tourists over the possibility of long-term change in the philosophy of incarceration in the United States.

The Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair accomplishes the tasks that Susan Sontag contends are the purpose of all experiences in a capitalist culture: the consumption of “vast amounts of entertainment” to “anesthetize the injuries of class, race and sex”.<sup>47</sup> The rodeo and crafts fair stages the incarcerated as the “other,” and in doing so reinforces the power inherent in the position of “free” non-incarcerated citizens. Incarcerated bodies are on display for visitors in a way that does not accurately represent the past or present reality of the daily experience of incarceration. Yet, many visitors left the experience believing that they had witnessed a successful model of contemporary prison management, where well-behaved men are rewarded and dangerous men receive discipline. Take the response of Ashley, who after her visit had an enlightened view of the prison system. When asked what she learned about Angola, she said: “they don’t have it that bad off, if they get to spend time making arts and crafts.” Tom also left the event feeling that Angola might not be such a bad place. Tom tells me as we walk to our cars: “the best thing is not to be in prison at all. But if one is, Angola appears to be a good one to be in.” For these tourists, the success of the event was convincing them that the largest, and once considered bloodiest, maximum-security prison in the United States is “a good one to be in.”

The success of the spectacle of discipline put on display at the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair is achieved through the erasure of history, which, according to Debord is the “first priority” of the spectacle. With the disappearance of historical knowledge “contemporary events themselves retreat into a fabulous distance, among its unverifiable stories, uncheckable statistics, unlikely explanations and untenable reasoning”.<sup>48</sup> Opening up the prison to the non-incarcerated public provides an unusual level of access. The Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair has the potential to affect the non-incarcerated citizen’s understanding of the prison system. More than

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<sup>47</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘The Image-World’ in Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (eds), *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London: Sage Publications, 1999, p. 93.

<sup>48</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Para. 6-7.

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70,000 non-incarcerated citizens travel to Angola each year, but they are entertained, not educated. The possibility for connection or identification between “free” and incarcerated citizens is lost when the prison is situated as a form of entertainment and an opportunity to “gaze” at a notoriously invisible segment of the population.

If the purpose of the Angola Rodeo and Crafts Fair, as warden Burl Cain publicly articulates, is to bring critical attention to the state of the prison system, then it can be argued that allowing currently incarcerated men (and women) to talk with non-incarcerated visitors about life in prison would have the potential to increase the visitor’s knowledge about the prison system. It is through the stories of incarceration that can be told by those living within the system that there is a possibility for another perspective on the prison system to exist in the collective discourse on incarceration, one that many non-incarcerated citizens infrequently hear. Personal stories can open up worlds and experiences that would otherwise be confined to the secrecy of the hidden prisons in our culture. Stories told by those living within the confines of the prison might have the effect of humanizing the experience of incarcerated men and women, which Robert Perkinson cites as the only recourse to “imagine a way out of our current criminal justice imbroglio” which begins with not only insisting that incarceration “become more humane” but that “prisoners be acknowledged as fully human”.<sup>49</sup> Dehumanizing the men incarcerated at Angola by using them as props for the staging of a performance of discipline and state power does none of the work Perkinson outlines. Simply reframing the language used when advertising the event would go a long way in humanizing the experience. Using words like “convict”, “inmate”, and “prisoner” reduce the individual to a singular subject position that conjures images of a barbaric and violent individual. The language used is a semantic return to the brutality of the prison systems past.

The Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair works in direct contrast to the reform efforts attempting to humanize the experience of incarceration by seeking identification between incarcerated and non-incarcerated citizens. The Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair only expands the gulf between incarcerated and non-incarcerated citizens and further reinforces the experience of incarceration as “alien” and the currently incarcerated individual as “other.” At the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair tourists never enter the stage of efficacy in the social drama. Tourists are prevented from and not encouraged to understand the prison system or identify with the incarcerated men. While “perfect trans-cultural understanding” will not be achieved at this event, as is the case with any performance, Victor Turner argues that engaging the experiences of another “in their original socio-cultural setting draws the actors into ‘other ways of seeing’”.<sup>50</sup> The other way of seeing the prison system that is drawn forth at the Angola Prison Rodeo and Crafts Fair is that of the prison system as a spectacle and site of surveillance. The events at Angola reinforce the stigma attached to the prison system that is all too familiar in the imagination of the tourist.

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<sup>49</sup> Perkinson, *Angola and Prison Reform*, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire*, p. 18.

Taylor suggests that what the performance might give us is information about "our [own] desire for access" and that performance can reveal the "politics of our [own] interpretations".<sup>51</sup> The opportunity to listen, and perhaps relate across differences, is not recognized at the Angola Rodeo and Crafts Fair, because human connection and humanizing the prison population is not the purpose of the event. The Rodeo and Crafts Fair were designed as entertainment, not education. Whether intended or not, the outcome of the event is that non-incarcerated citizens are reassured of the success of the prison system and are absolved of the guilt associated with not acknowledging the complexity of the prison system as an inhumane and unhealthy political institution. A prison system that can exist as a tourist attraction is not the site to challenge the supposed naturalness of the divide between "free" and incarcerated citizens. "Jailhouse Artists" and "Inmate Cowboys" perform on center stage at Angola where the experience of incarceration is commodified, the desire to survey the other is satiated, and the idea of *reintegration* into the community is rendered impossible.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

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