

I had no idea of what I was going to experience that day. I had never seen a prison, or a rodeo & the thought of the two being mixed together sounded dark & troubling. What sick world do we have, where seemingly respectable adults gather together to watch the brutal spectacle of prisoner vs bull, all while consuming corn dogs & soda..!?? My mind raced with a mix of deep seeded paranoia for the police, and a surreal excitement to see what these humans call a southern tradition. This was my first time experiencing the true south & the Angola Prison Rodeo was likely going to be the most southern event I could possibly witness... I was invited, tickets provided. Who was I to refuse such an odd offer? I felt, despite feeling dirty with only hearing 'prison rodeo', that the American people deserve to know what masochistic activities still linger from those days of the Roman empire.

It was a long drive through a beautiful southern landscape of thick forests with a few roadside shops scattered along the way. I did my best to take in the beautiful countryside, suppressing the building paranoia inside me. "Why am I walking into a prison? Marijuana is fresh in my blood & those bastards will never let me leave" I tune into the mindless conversations being mumbled by the people in the vehicle, while counting trees. The thick green roads reminded me of Vermont. Perhaps our attachment to states is only a silly illusion which seems to really divide emotionally unstable people. The idea sounds good on paper, like a unit of measurement.. and perhaps a concept We the People could use in the distant future, but not in present times. We are much too unstable & irrational, a deep fear the human community just doesn't want to move past.. East vs. West.. The North, the South.. And everyone against California, those goddamned snowflakes! Still, all arguments for individuality aside:all the states share the same mathematics of Nature & society.. same spiral of houses.. same junk in the yards. The only difference between our great states, is the dogmatic key words of our Mighty Ego.

We ended up on a small road, which eventually broke free from the thick trees & the world around me became a vast wasteland of swampy looking patches of flat land shaped into squares. In the distance I could see the Angola Prison. The prison was surrounded by layers of fences & guard towers placed at the far corners. The place was packed full of people, parking mostly giant trucks and waddling into what looked like a Mad Max theme park.

Entering the prison grounds felt rather easy, much like entering an amusement park. Without any regard, or safety, people just walked right into the prison grounds... Right away I could smell deep frying stations & meats being smoked. We walked a few feet past a couple guards & the prison turned into a wonderland of food, displays of art,

leather & furniture made by the crafty inmates. The decor surrounding all these booths was a whorish presentation of national pride, only Americans & Dictators could love.

The prisoners who behaved in a positive manner, were able to be out among the crowd. They sold their works, making pennies to the dollar. Everything was sold at very low prices; and these savages, known as the general public, were haggling & consuming everything in sight. Have we no shame!?? What swine are we, to take such pride in purchasing amazing wooden tables, for clearly dirt low prices? I seemed to be the only human taken back by the madness before me. All this and I'd only taken a few steps into the grounds.

The people I arrived with began slowly looking at each table, passing small talk & opinions to each other. My head was going crazy & It didn't take long before I wandered off into the crowd; which was not unusual for me to do. Here I was, walking around this godless madness. Oversized Americas consuming pizza & corn dogs passed by me, spewing verbal bullshit & taking advantage of cheap products made by slaves. I'm not defending the criminals really, I'm sure they're mostly assholes.. but to exploit people in such a fashion felt very primitive and yet this seemed to be a world I felt would take control quickly if society collapsed. Liberal, Conservatives.. it doesn't matter; both sides would form ISIS style groups in a day.. systematically cleansing the territory they'd fight for.. So many groups of people end up spewing the same bullshit, just with different keywords. Take a look right behind the practiced phrases & smiles, you will see the darkness within every human. We are indeed, only an animal hiding behind religious ideas of sacred morals. I call bullshit, for if such "truths" were true, this very event I roam would not exist. These bible pushers would not have it!! But here we are.. godless consumers, detached emotionally & taking advantage of everything we can from the prisoners we are supposed to be encouraging to heal & rejoin society.

I noticed a prisoner sitting with some tables I assumed he'd made. He seemed, from afar, relaxed and I watched roll a smoke as he watched people walking by. This was someone I wanted to speak with so I approached him. I introduced myself, asked if I could join him for a smoke. He told me about who he was, and how he took a man's life nearly 20 years ago. Today his body was frail, aged & dried up inside these prison walls. Long peppered hair lay pulled back into a ponytail. He was proud of his wood work, and spent as much time as he could in the craft areas. His life in prison seemed to have settled in for this man. His voice was content, and he felt present in his reality. I sat with him a little while longer, until I noticed my people floating by. I jumped up and went to check in.

My ability to disappear usually irritates most people, but it is a trait I cannot shake. No matter where I am, if I get that buzz, I start to follow my nose.... Again I wandered away, needing time so I could soak up the people around me. I made my way around the isles of different creations. A lot of this work was amazing, tables, stands, clocks, belts, you

name it... I came to the end of good behavior prisoners & noticed a new section. A long wall of tall fence, 8 feet high, separated these unhinged prisoners from the customers in this area. Nothing sweet about these animals, they set up rows tables full of random shit, spread out like a dirty old thrift store. Unorganized piles of college t-shirts, headphones & odd things piled up. Behind the fence, an army of smart ass men hung on the chain links ready to start talking or cat-calling to anyone that came within 10 feet of them. I was quickly called out, a million questions about my hair, where I was from, why I was here.. weed.. money... etc. I knew I stood out among all the other people here. Lots of American Flag shirts, Jesus hats wearing southerners filled the space around me. I could smell the pride of those not locked behind the fences as they wandered with an odd sense of superiority, all while shoving popcorn or fried bread dough in their faces. What an image.. What a goddamn planet!

I walked through the area, taking in this insane prison production. I was eventually spotted by peeps I arrived with & soon after an announcement was made about the soon to start rodeo. We all walked into the bullfighting arena. This was built right on the grounds, showing me that it was a recurring event for the state. While people filled the seats, the prison had little shows to keep the crowd laughing & their dicks hard.

First up was a monkey dressed like a Cowboy. The monkey rode out on a dog, while some human told a story about the old times & wild west...blah blah blah. The monkey did a couple tricks, held up toy guns & rode away on his doggy horse. People shouted and cheered, whistling with amazement like we just found the cure to cancer.. instead it was a monkey on a dog.. Seeing such a response to this, I really believe that humans have the emotional & mental maturity of a 4 year old. This is the best we got so far.

Next up two buffalos came walking out. I could tell those animals had done this way too many times, and showed zero sign of enthusiasm for being alive. Behind the buffalo was a large red pickup truck, with a ramp attached into the bed. It parked in the middle of the arena & out came another damn cowboy with a headset. He began to ramble on about Indians & America, while mounting a horse. Oh yeah, this cowboy only had one hand... I'm pretty sure his name had something to do with one armed something or another. So, Mr. Cowboy galloped around on his horse, telling a very dull tale about a fantasy world filled with Indians, buffaloes & American flags... perhaps a little Jesus sprinkled into the imagery. He swooped around the buffalo, herding the two up onto the truck's ramp which went up to the roof.. all while firing blanks out of his little pistols. The crowd cheered, as the buffalo stood atop the big red American truck... a symbol of freedom & hard work in these parts. These mystic creatures looked on awkwardly as the cowboy made laps around the truck, shooting more blanks and "yee-hawing". This went on for another ten minutes before the next round of side shows took to the floor.

Round three was the local female barrel racing group. This was a collection of young girls, who rode out in pairs down a straight away, around a barrel & sprinting back to the finish line. Each girl competed wearing small shorts, pigtailed & fancy hats. People hooted and hollered, completely enthralled by the patriotic spectacle that was little innocent girls riding big bad horses.. mmm, what a fantasy. One could feel the sexual tension mixed with the rising thirst for blood. The girls raced away, round after round... I couldn't really find much entertainment from any of this. I wanted to see some chains involved... the two girls racing neck & neck, swinging weapons at each other while making their way around the barrels. Unfortunately, this did not happen. All the cowgirls finished their performance without any violence.

The main event.

In the middle of the arena was placed a small poker table. Four men took their seats & started playing cards. An announcer took over the airwaves & explained the rules. The four men had to stay seated, and the last to stand would win money. With that, it was time to release the bull. A silence fell over the crowd, who waited on edge for the gate to open. I heard a clang, and the bull came rushing out of its chamber. It ran full speed right toward the group of card players. The bull smashed into the back of one of the prisoners, sending him through the card table & into the dirt. In the same flash, the bull ran over his body & the three remaining men survived the first wave of attack. The bull dug into the dirt, ten feet from the poker table, which now lay in pieces. Three men gripped their chairs in horror, eyes locked on the massive beast. The first victim crawled on his belly away from the mess, eventually getting hauled off by a rescue crew. The crowd was going crazy, calling out & whistling. The bull made fresh calculations, preparing to crush the remaining humans in his way. The bull ran back toward the remaining men, causing one to jump up at the last second before being run down & tossed into the air like a soccer ball. Before the man hit the ground, the bull spun around and smashed into another prisoner. As one man landed on his back, another became a welcome mat for the angry bull. Both men were now rolling on the dirt in pain, leaving a winner who still sat in his seat. Clowns came running out, pulling the attention of the beast away from the fresh pile of bodies. The winning man jumped out of his seat, making a break away to the wall. The bull caught this plan & took off after the winner. I watched the man jump 6 feet up, barely making out of the line of fire that was the Bulls forehead.

The announcer came back, getting the crowd wound up for the next set of fun. Next around ten people walked out onto the dirt. They took places, spread out from each other. The idea was to hold your ground. Two bulls came rushing out onto the dirt, weaving through the men standing still around them. A couple minutes passed before

contact was made, sending a man flying through the air. The crowd laughed out loud, showing no emotion for the trampled prisoners below. Some hit the ground with a thud I could hear from the stands. I know damn well that some of these people received serious internal injuries. Not to worry, they are but only filthy prisoners. It was their life choices that led them onto this dirt battle ground... so fuck it, right? Men crawled in pain away from the raging animals, sometimes being caught up again in the mighty horns. A few remained unmoved, awaiting their fate... be it money or pain. The announcer rang out, asking for cheers for those still standing. The smell of popcorn surrounded me, I felt like I was stuck in a modern roman nightmare. This is what Nazi-America would feel like if WW2 ended up a little differently. Instead of prisoners, we'd gather to watch Jews, artists & poor people being attacked by wild animals. It all was surreal and uncomfortable... Yet here I was. Popcorn, American flags, Jesus hats & prisoners being trampled by bulls.

The final round of madness was a doozy. The prison had a special Bull waiting to be unleashed. The announcer boasted about the awesome fury that was this animal. Legendary in size & anger, this was going to be the headlining event. Attached to the forehead of this Bull was placed a poker chip. The goal was simple: get the poker chip off the bulls face. The poker chip was heavily guarded by massive horns, held by a skull the size of my midsection. 20 or so prisoners made their way onto the dirt, taking positions and waiting nervously. The crowd fell quiet, white knuckles gripping seats. Out came the bull, running full speed into the large gathering of inmates. People tripped over one another, men falling to the ground trying to escape the path of the bull. The bull would pivot, quickly taking out people on its side. His head was like a small car, smashing everything in the way. Within seconds, people already fell victim to the bull & the small rescue team began pulling people off the field. I watched a couple men off to the side, psyching themselves up and making a run at the bull. One dude jumped up at the Bulls head, only to be batted away like a small fly. The Bull was unchallenged against these humans, and made little effort to inflict large amounts of pain. People in the stands continued to freak out, cheering, whistling & tossing popcorn. Everyone now had the taste of blood, and if left to these games on the daily, would quickly turn into gladiator style killing sprees for sure. After a few minutes, someone managed to grab the poker chip from the Bulls head. Only a couple men remained standing, one limping. The rodeo clowns once again made their way out, trying to tame the beast. I think the winning inmate made like \$300 as a prize. Just like that, everything was over. Right away the elderly onlookers started making their break for the parking lot and or bathroom. I followed the crowd as we all made our way back out of the prison grounds. I kept thinking how easy it would be to sneak someone out of this property.. just a quick switch of clothing & out one could walk. I also thought of the prisoners, those now injured and what their next week would be like. This event happens once a year, and then it all goes back to "normal" prison reality. It was all so confusing and depressing.

After witnessing such a day, I now feel even less faith in humanity than I did the day before.

I sat in the car, speechless. The people I was with quickly found the need to recap everything we all just watched, splicing in their narration and or emotional response with childlike enthusiasm. The car drove away I couldn't help but think "What the fuck did I just witness"? This was not something I wanted to say outside my head, for I still had a lot of the south to take in.