

# From Alcatraz to Pelican Bay

## Are we safer? Are we all human?



"Alcatraz03182006" photographed by and copyright of (c) David Corby

When Alcatraz was opened as a prison in 1934, it was considered the most secure facility for those the system judged "the worst of the worst."

In 1963, when high-profile abuses by guards forced the federal government to close Alcatraz, the prison system built a new prison to hold about 500 prisoners, mostly transfers from Alcatraz. Then 'behavior control units' sprang into use across the U.S. causing high rates of suicide due to the small spaces and absolute isolation. By 1999, the United States built at least 57 supermax facilities, spread across 30–34 states. Guards are hired with high school diplomas only, and in CA, starting salary is \$75,000/year, and they make even higher pay when watching men and women in solitary for 23 hours a day.

In California, those the prison system fears the most are sent to Pelican Bay State Prison, one of several of California's supermaxes, which holds over 1,400 prisoners in solitary confinement at that prison, a practice internationally recognized as torture.

This practice continues despite the fact that there is zero evidence that placing people in isolation deters or prevents further crimes. In fact there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary: that solitary confinement de-humanizes both prisoners and guards making them more dangerous.

In 2011, prisoners in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay State Prison organized a hunger strike to call the public's attention to the barbaric and destructive practice of solitary. A second hunger strike in 2013, after the California Department of Correction (CDC) failed to deliver any meaningful changes, was joined by at least 30,000 prisoners according to CDC's own count. The prisoners' foremost demand is to be recognized as human beings. Their insights into why people require human connections to survive, and how best to attain rehabilitation for people in prison, is at the heart of this struggle.

**The prison system is a colossal failure.  
Isn't it time to rethink it?**

To find out more, visit  
[prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com](http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com)

