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Is New York a model for fixing California prisons?



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Law professor Jonathan Simon at the University of California, Berkeley pointed to prison reforms in the Empire State as a model that should be followed here in the Golden State.

Simon, who teaches an undergraduate course on prisons, wrote on UC Berkeley's official blog that although New York has a long history of "bad penal policy choices," it also tends to fix those bad choices more quickly than other states, particularly California.

Even as California Gov. Jerry Brown spars with the federal government [over court-ordered changes to the state's prisons](#), which are badly overcrowded, New York has moved away from automatic sentencing that overfilled its prisons. Starting two decades ago, New York has eased those rules, particularly for people caught with drugs, and closed 14 prisons.

Now New York is reconsidering its use of solitary confinement, an issue that's been hotly debated in California since prisoners in Pelican Bay's isolation unit went on a hunger strike and supported a lawsuit regarding their treatment.

California locks up its most dangerous gang member criminals in Pelican Bay's SHU, or security housing unit.

Simon suggests California's corrections department boss, Jeffrey Beard, follow the example of his opposite number in another state, Colorado. Rick Raemisch, head of Colorado's prisons, spent a night in one of his state's isolation cells, and [wrote about the experience in the *New York Times*](#).

[Read Simon's blog here.](#)

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