

Visible

Atonement through transforming America's
Prisons

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Architecture

University of Washington
2013

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Architecture

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Abstract

Visible: Atonement through transforming
America's Prisons

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Abstract

The prison system in the United States is a disgrace, adversely affecting disadvantaged or minority populations as a continuing form of oppression. It has reached such a scale that over two million people are currently in prison, with black or Latino people making up over 60 percent. The out-of-control mass incarceration movement since 1980 has left a substantial mark on the landscape through an explosion of prison construction. However, as of 2009 that trend is reversing and the prison population is shrinking. As we, as a nation, move away from incarceration, how do we address these expansive prison buildings and campuses in a way that can better contribute to our society? Instead of ignoring or demolishing prisons, we can transform them, giving them new meaning while remembering those that the prison system harmed. In this way, prisons become symbols of atonement, an exercise that America has rarely practiced but needs to be incorporated into our traditions and memory.

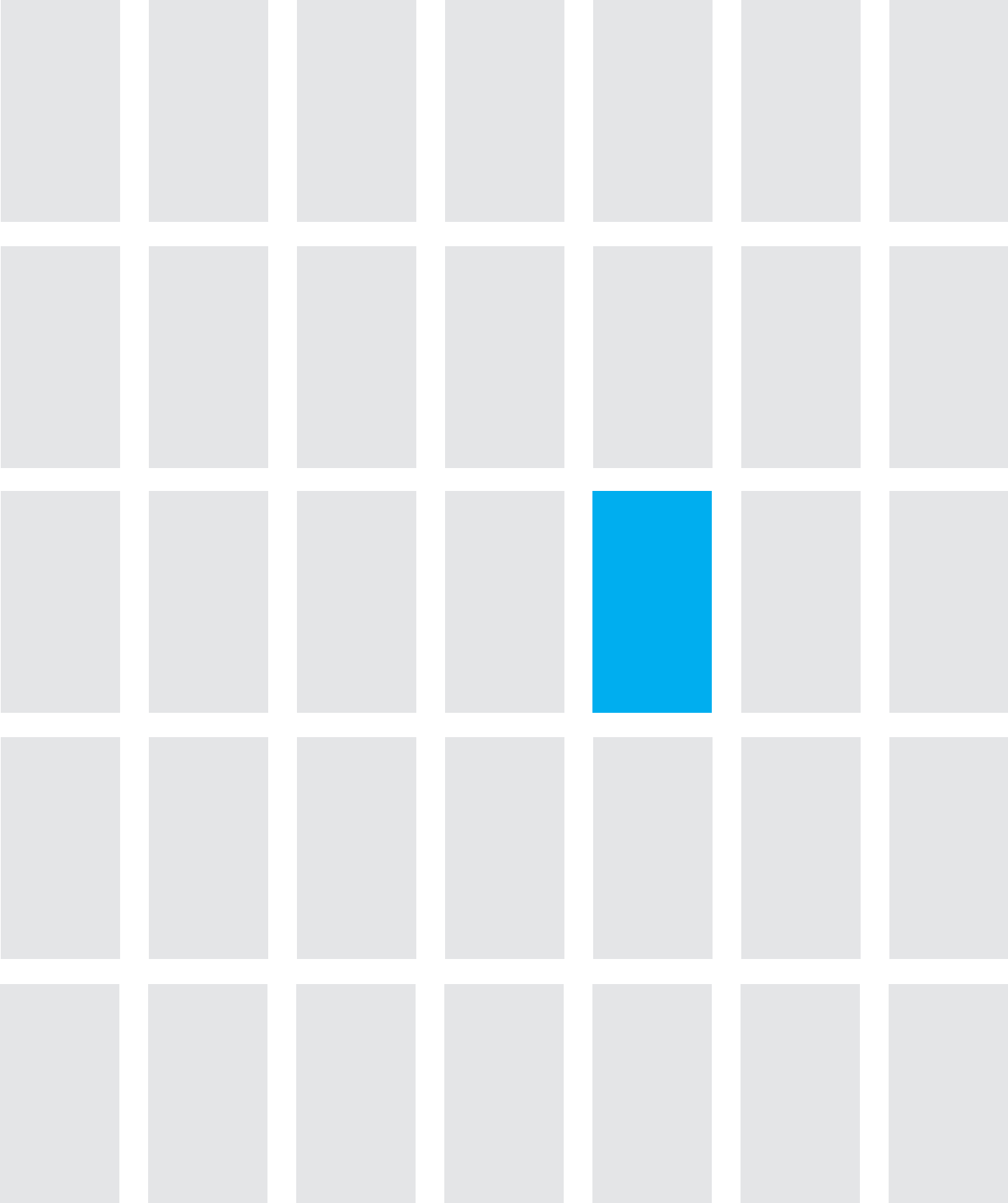
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To my parents, to my brother, and to my
godmamas for their unwavering love and
belief in me.



Visible

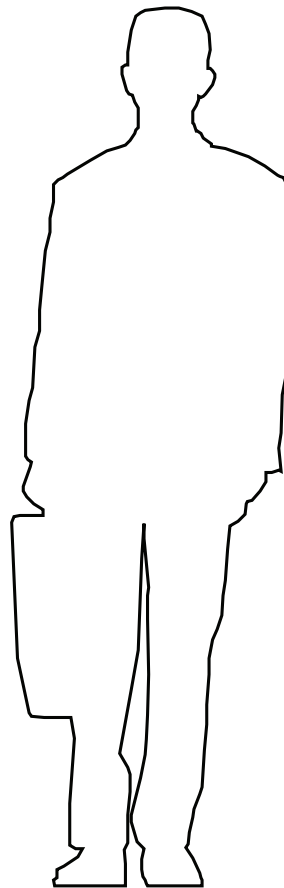
Atonement through transforming
America's Prisons

I am an invisible man. No I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe: Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, simply because people refuse to see me.

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Invisible | An Introduction to Incarceration in America

Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel artfully conveys the sentiments of a black man in America before the Civil Rights Movement gained force in 1954. He is invisible, pushed to the fringes of society so those who are visible, those who inhabit the main spheres of society, do not have to see him. Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the narrator of his 1952 novel, expresses the sentiments that were built into cities, houses, and customs. Even in the architecture in pre-civil rights America, the class system was evident—the back entrances of houses and restaurants, the hidden corridors for housekeepers or the minority neighborhoods on the other side of the tracks highlight class systems. The marginalization of minority populations was designed into American infrastructure: "Legalized segregation in the twentieth century sought to remove the



black population from the public gaze by creating separate and distinct social and political spaces... Political visibility and identity in this [public and civic] space was defined by Jim Crow laws, so that while blacks might literally occupy these spaces, their collective inability to vote and therefore access the political process rendered them invisible in these 'spaces of appearance.'"¹

The Civil Rights Movement brought political voice and visibility to disenfranchised black Americans. The segregation and inequality of the past seems like a bygone era and we believe that America has moved past the segregation that was so visible. Instead, oppression has adopted a new face, one more akin to the invisibility that Ellison described. Minority populations are still disenfranchised and still removed from society, their voice and rights taken, in a way that is seen as fair and just, using the United States prison system.

It is a part of human nature to believe that those who are privileged deserve their success and those who are disadvantaged deserve their hardship.² Perhaps this is why the criminal justice system and incarceration have been ignored for so long, allowed to proliferate to massive proportions where 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the United States.³ The current prison system continues the disenfranchisement and segregation that existed before the Civil Rights Movement. Looking at black

men in particular, a black male resident in California is more likely to go to a state prison than a state college.⁴ The prison system propagates existing inequalities thought to have dissipated or vanished. On the contrary, targeting certain populations continues to occur, elucidated in the current prison population.

Despite these blatant inequalities, they are not visible due to the nature of prisons. The dense prison walls keep the outside world from penetrating into the prison, oftentimes leaving only the sky as a connection. Despite their mass, prisons are designed to be invisible. It is not as much about keeping the prisoners from experiencing the world outside as it is about keeping them sequestered from the outside world, limiting their body and voice, so that they disappear from society.

The prison in America is a defunct and ineffectual architecture. Rather, we, as a society, believe that prisons function for rehabilitation. Contrary to that thought, they have become the new plantation.⁵ Michelle Alexander writes in *The New Jim Crow*, "The fact that more than half of the young black men in any large American city are currently under the control of the criminal justice system (or saddled with criminal records) is not—as many argue—just a symptom of poverty or poor choices, but rather evidence of a new racial caste system at work."⁶ Prisons are the tools that

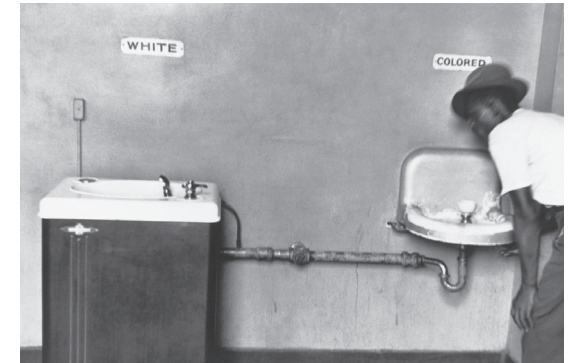


Fig. 1 : Segregation
An image depicting segregation before the Civil Rights Movement.



Fig. 2 A Prison Transformed

Nelson Mandela revisits his former cell at Robben Island Prison, now a historical museum.

propagate and hide oppression and inequality. The effects of removal are put into heartbreaking terms by Kenyatta Leal, a resident at San Quentin Prison in San Quentin, California:

This outta sight, outta mind dynamic is not unique to prison, but there's something about experiencing it while incarcerated that makes its impact so much more dramatic. In my case, it felt that as my relationships deteriorated, so did my capacity to have meaning in the outside world. I felt as though my friendships helped me maintain a sense of relevancy in life, and as a result I found myself trying desperately to hold onto friends and things we had in common. However, as my sentence progressed, so did the distance between the friends I once cherished and me. Slowly but surely, my physical absence whittled away at my relationships until my once vibrant social network was reduced to me, myself and I. For years, I put on a front like I wasn't affected by what was happening, but inside I agonized over the loss of my friends. I ended up feeling disconnected, like I no longer mattered to anyone in the outside world.⁷

Prisons, built to protect, instead act as instruments to render invisible still existing inequalities. But there is hope. While America still houses the majority of the world's prisoners, as of

2009 and each year since, the prison population has declined for the first time since 1972.⁸ The decrease is thought to be a result of several factors: changing outlooks on criminal acts; addressing lopsided incarceration rates among minorities; and the large economic cost to the government. Whatever the reasons, the prison population is decreasing and expected to continue. Prison facilities are closing, leaving empty shells—scars—on the landscape. An opportunity arises to mend and reshape the architecture, representing a great potential to rectify past oppressions. Maya Angelou's words in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* aptly describe this potential: "Anything that works against you can also work for you."

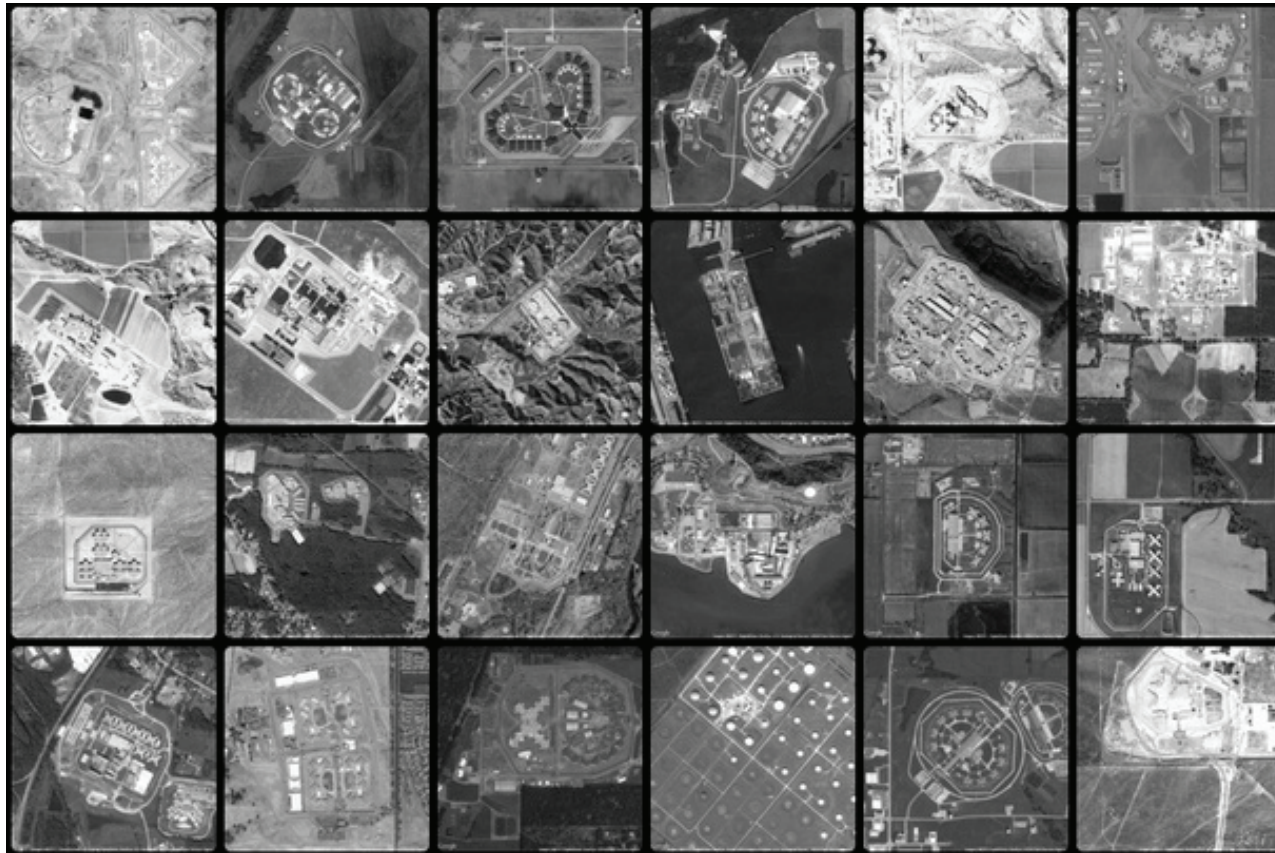


Fig. 3 Prison Complex

This montage displays aerial views of massive prison campuses.

The prison is above all punitive, it operates to break the human spirit, to exploit human weakness, undermine human strength, destroy initiative, individuality, negate intelligence, and process amorphous, robot-like mass. The great challenge is how to resist, how not to adjust, to keep intact the knowledge of society outside and to live by its rules, for that is the only way to maintain the human and social within you...

Nelson Mandela



Fig. 4 The Auburn System

The tiers of cells stacked against the wall in Auburn Prison, Auburn, New York.

Ancestry | A Brief History of Prisons

Though currently the norm, mass incarceration is somewhat of a recent phenomenon in human history. Former modes of punishment were primarily fines and penalties in addition to alternative forms of corporal punishment, forced labour and social ostracism. These punishments shifted toward incarceration at the time of the 18th Century Enlightenment in the West. Interestingly, incarceration began as a way to achieve equality amongst classes. Previously, when a person was fined yet could not pay for their crime, confinement took its place. Because the wealthier class could pay to escape incarceration and the poor could not, prisons became a ubiquitous system that punished all equally, no matter their station.

Today, the prison system proliferates as the main form of criminal punishment. In a country founded on the belief in freedom and liberty, it seems the best punishment for criminals is to remove or restrict freedom. This Enlightenment attitude, combined with America's early colonial founder's religious views, named the first prisons "penitentiaries," viewing the prisoners as the penitents who served time for their sins. In response to the poor conditions found in prisons and in the spirit of prison reformation, architects of the Enlightenment strove to make prisons more

humane for living and rehabilitation, adding spaces for socializing, activity and sunlight.

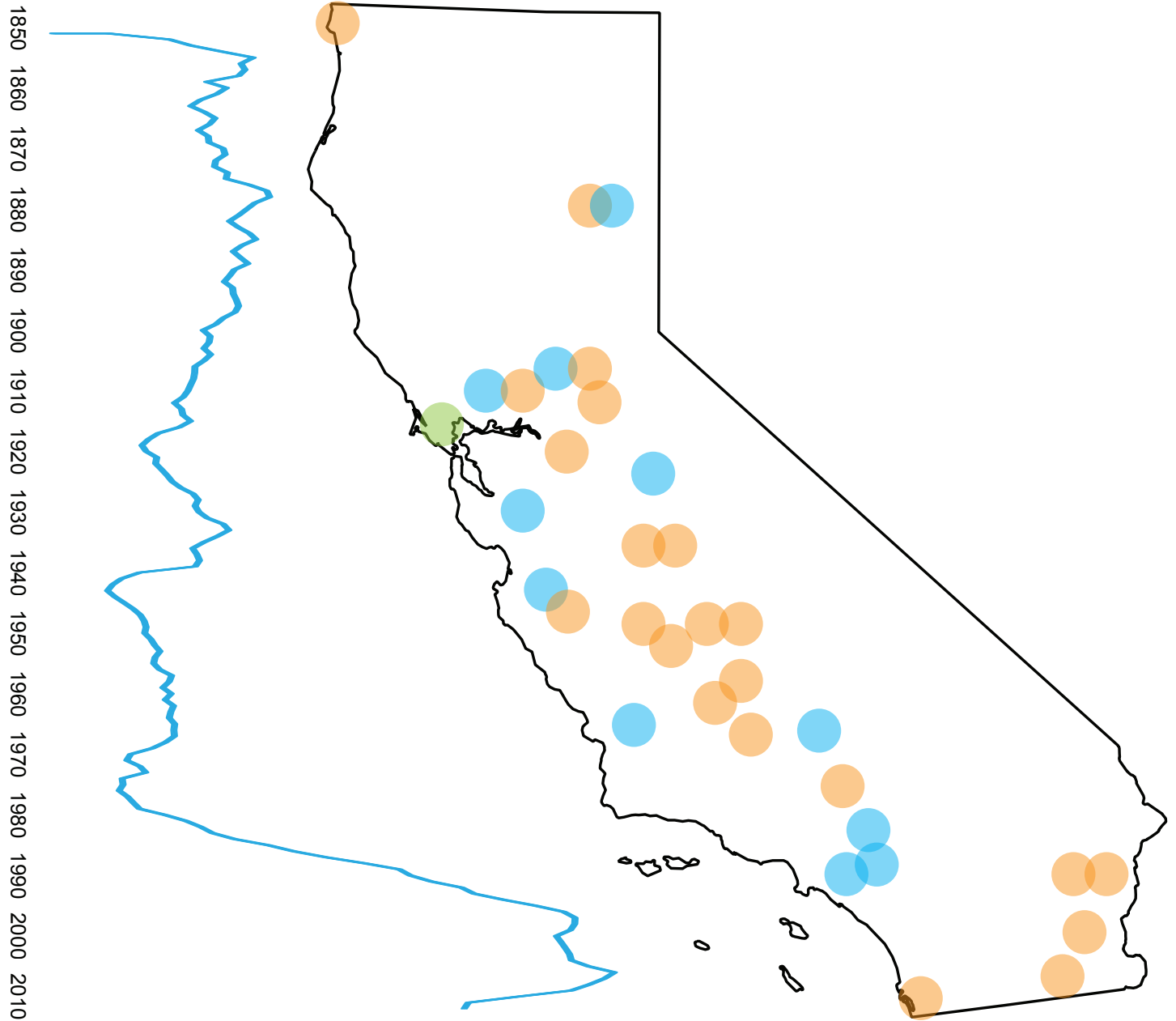
This rehabilitative attitude vanished as the Auburn model took precedence. Started in Auburn, New York in the 1820s, this system siloed prisoners into small cells at night with silent work in communal areas during the day. Small cells were arranged in tiers on one wall of the building connected by balcony corridors. This prison plan became the dominant system for most American prison construction.⁹ The official term changed from penitentiaries to corrections facilities, moving away from sin and penance, where the moniker currently stands. Today, despite improved services and living conditions, the sheer amount of prisoners has created cramped and inadequate facilities.¹⁰

Fig. 5 California's Prison Population

This graph shows the relatively steady prison population in California until the spike beginning in 1980; the graph also eerily mimics California's coastline.

Fig. 6 California's Prisons

Of California's 33 prisons, 21 were built since 1980. These are noted in orange and the previous 12 noted in blue, save for the first prison, San Quenin, noted in green.



Inhabit | Incarceration Statistics

The 1980s saw a massive increase in the prison population, leading to overcrowded prisons and the need to build more and larger complexes. Yet the increase is not due to an increase in crime. In fact, non-violent crimes committed from 1980 to 1995 declined and less than a third of convicts were incarcerated due to a violent crime. Instead, crimes, mostly drug-related, that would normally have led to community service, fines or treatment in other countries, equate to a prison term in the United States.¹¹ There are approximately 750 prisoners per every 100,000 citizens, or less than 1% of the population. That number is drastically different when put in context among different groups. Approximately 70 percent of US prison inmates are illiterate; 200,000 suffer from serious mental illness; sixty to 80 percent have a history of substance abuse; half of inmates are African-American and one out of every fourteen black men is now in prison; one out of every four black men will be imprisoned at some point in his lifetime.¹² These statistics expose the vast inequality within the justice and prison system, disproportionately affecting different race and class groups in America. In fact, though rates of illegal drug use are the same in black men and white men, black men are five times as likely to be arrested for a drug offence. White, middle class

Americans report higher instances of drug use but blacks are four times as likely to be arrested for a drug offence.¹³ In 2009, according to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, the black population in the US is 13.7 percent but in US prisons that number is 40 percent. Similarly, Latinos make up 16.3 percent of the population but are 20.6 percent of the prison population. In total, these groups make up over two-thirds of the prisoners in the United States.

The over-zealous incarceration of America's citizens has reached a point that prisons were operating at double their intended capacity. Despite the fact that California, with the nation's largest population and largest prison system, built twenty-one new prisons in twenty years, there was not enough space to house all of the inmates. Partially in response to overcrowded conditions, new laws and regulations enacted are lowering the prison population. From 2009 and each year since, the prison population has declined with the trends continuing each year since.¹⁴ The decrease is a result of several factors: changing outlooks on criminal acts; rectifying lopsided incarceration rates among minorities; and reallocating state and federal funds. Whatever the reasons, prisons are emptying, turning into ghostly shells, haunted by the men who formerly resided within.

Fig. 7 Prison Demographics

(Opposite page) The bar graph compares the prison population to the national population and California's population; the graph shows the dramatic increase in the prison population beginning in 1980.



1920
<200,000

1980
320,000

2008
>2,300,000

US
POPULATION

US PRISON
POPULATION

CALIFORNIA
POPULATION

CA PRISON
POPULATION

BLACK
LATINO
WHITE
ASIAN
OTHER

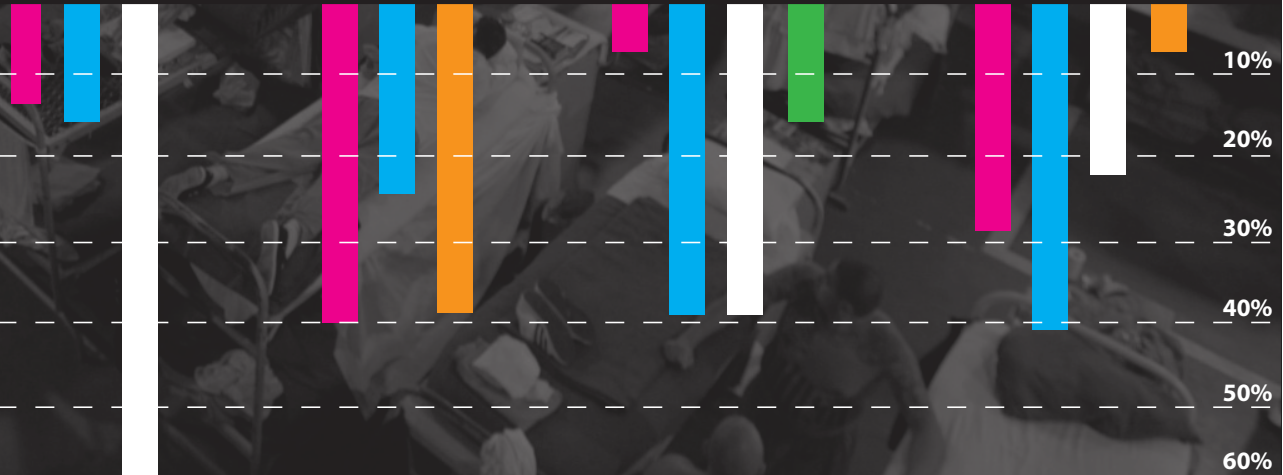
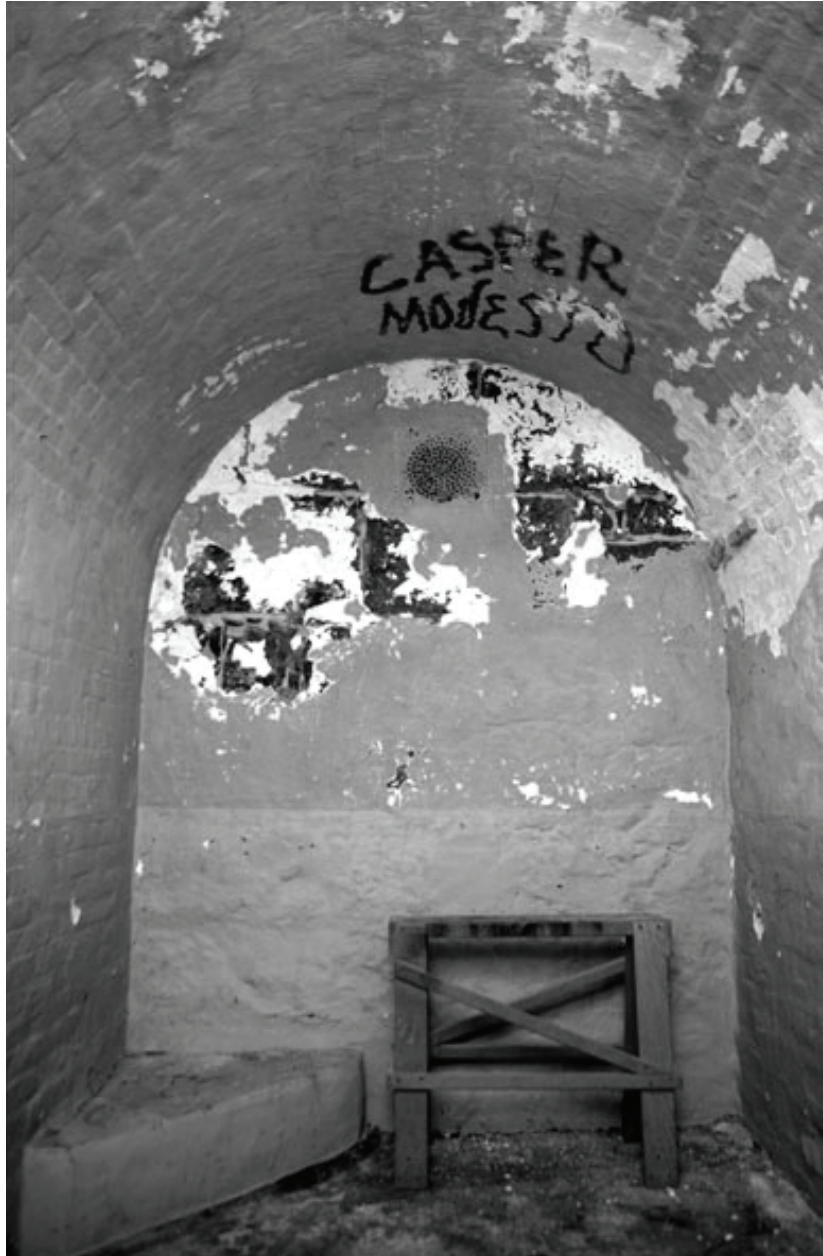


photo: Huffington Post 2012-9-15

Fig. 8 A Historic Site

The “dungeon” is part of the oldest surviving building of San Quentin, built by the original residents.



Corporeal | The Site at San Quentin, California

On the western shores of the San Francisco bay, north of the Golden Gate Bridge, San Quentin State Prison nestles up to the water. Prior to the San Quentin facility, the first California prison was the Waban, a prison ship that floated offshore in the bay. The prison was built by the very prisoners who were housed on the Waban and on July 14th, 1852—Bastille Day—the San Quentin facility opened. It has been in continual use as a prison since its inauguration. At the time it was built, San Quentin was far removed from the booming gold rush city of San Francisco, selected as an ideal site because of its remoteness and security—it is surrounded by hills, the bay, and marshlands.¹⁵

Located in Marin County, an affluent suburb just north of San Francisco, the prison’s site has become a controversy. Reading about the prison’s locale is akin to reading through the most sought-after property in the real estate section: “it has become one of the most desirable places to live in the state, a high-end suburb of wooded hills and spectacular bay views just a 10-minute drive from the Golden Gate.”¹⁶ Its site is ideal for future ferry access to San Francisco. San Quentin meets the bay where the Richmond Bridge crosses from the East Bay. This further increases the value of the land as a

future possibility to extend form of mass transit or BART, the bay area's public transit rail line.

All of these factors contribute to San Quentin's value as developable land. Estimates range from 250 million to two billion dollars of revenue for the state if the land were to be sold and developed. In addition to developing the land, the economic benefits increase by ceasing San Quentin's operating costs, at 164 million dollars annually¹⁷. The site is highly desirable and in the state's currently troubled budget, talk in Sacramento, California's capitol city, as well as Marin County has persisted for years, discussing options if the prison were to close. Land values in Marin have escalated past the rate of inflation for years, with the land retaining some of the highest values in the country. However, because San Quentin is a maximum security facility, as well as the only facility to house state death row inmates, its relocation has proved unmanageable thus far.

Besides its physical location, San Quentin is a historic site. Of the 200 various buildings on site, several date to the original construction in the early 1850s and two other major expansion projects—one in the late 19th century and another in the 1920s and 1930s. San Quentin was not a planned compound but has expanded gradually and haphazardly since its inception. In Building 22, the original cells, called the dungeon, are believed to

be the original San Quentin prison and the oldest surviving building constructed by the state of California. In the historic sector, multiple buildings constructed pre-1900 have been in continuous use. Building 19, the entry of the prison and face of San Quentin, built in 1890, follows the Auburn System of small cells arranged against one wall to aid control and surveillance.¹⁸ The crenellated castle façade carries on San Quentin's nickname as the "Bastille of the Bay" and suggests a fortress within its walls.

State Historian Kevin Starr explains why the structure should be preserved: "It was the state's first public work, before the Capitol building, the roadways, the public colleges and universities. Its preservation is not trivial. Like the catacombs in Rome, it's where people suffered."¹⁹ San Quentin is often compared to Alcatraz, now a landmark site with over one million visitors a year and has an almost mythological place among American prisons. But when speaking of the San Quentin dungeon, Sgt. Rudy Luna, administrative assistant to former San Quentin Warden Robert Ayers, explains that the prison's future could be preservation and even limited public tours: "If you know history, then you won't make the same mistakes."²⁰ Even operating as a prison, this site has the potential to educate. The original cells remind that inmates are people, physical and fragile beings. San Quentin holds in



Fig. 9 San Quentin Prison
This aerial image of San Quentin highlights its beautiful and coveted location on San Francisco Bay.



Fig. 10 Face of San Quentin
The tower of Building 19 of San Quentin is clearly shown, with the artillery tower in the foreground.



Fig. 11 San Quentin Location
A Google Earth satellite image of the San Francisco Bay.

one site the entire history of the California prison system. To tear down California's oldest state institution and convert it into high-priced suburbs would be an easy way to forget those that were affected.

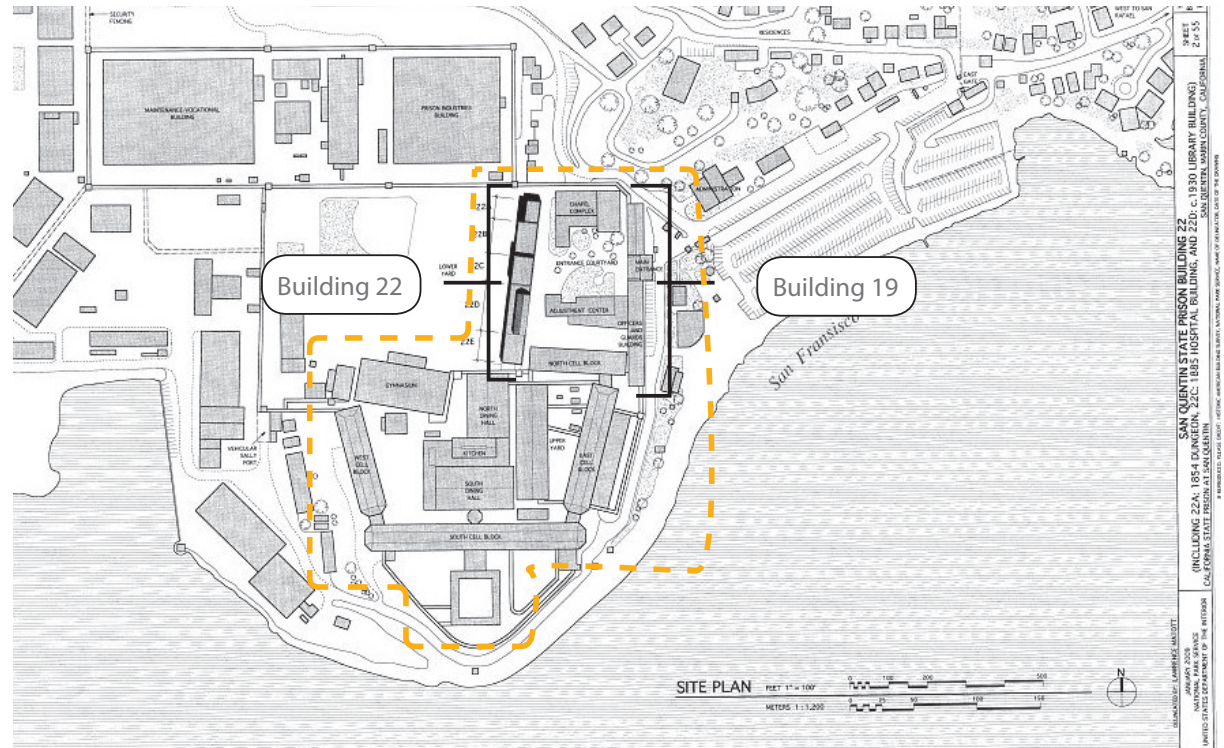


Fig. 12 Historic Site Plan
The historic sector of the prison [outlined]; these buildings are sited as historic and have been a subject for preservation in future development plans.



Fig. 13 Library System
Architectural design for prisons and schools are juxtaposed in the Dewey Decimal System.

Compassion | Current San Quentin Education and Outreach

While San Quentin deserves its notoriety as a harsh and merciless environment, its proximity to a dense urban area has given its inmates possibilities unavailable in prisons elsewhere. Manufacturing has long been a part of the prison system, recalling the image of the prisoner stamping license plates. In San Quentin, a prison that was originally constructed by its prisoners, work becomes a type of education. The prison is set up to manufacture furniture and mattresses. Vocational work is prevalent, with a machine shop, dry cleaning, a print shop and other facilities that allow the prisoners to train in areas ranging from graphic arts to landscaping to plumbing to sheet metal. These learned skills translate to experience and employment opportunities. For example, in June 2011, NASA partnered with San Quentin to manufacture parts for orbital deployers, mechanisms that mount satellites for launch. The program specifically aims to help “a few select inmates develop their machining skills to make them more employable in the aerospace industry upon release.”²¹ This program is one of many intended to foster advanced education and training for San Quentin’s inmates.

Education is the other major program

present within San Quentin’s walls. Prisoners, who most often come to San Quentin without having completed high school or knowing English, have access to basic adult education, high school GED programs, English as a Second Language (ESL), and literacy programs. Inmates can earn a university degree through the Prison University Project. In many ways, the prison operates like a school. Extra-curricular activities and clubs include drama through the Shakespeare workshop, creative writing classes and publication through Brothers in Pen and *The San Quentin News* (the prison newspaper), and technology and business internship development through the Last Mile Program. The Last Mile’s objective is to bridge the gap between incarceration and freedom.”²² The program trains San Quentin inmates in social media, communication, and business operation. The participants invent and present a business plan with a technology component and social cause as their final project. The project is about transitioning from the prison to the free world, giving the men new and applicable skills.

Even physical education has a doppelganger within the prison walls. San Quentin has tennis courts, basketball courts, a baseball field and even yoga classes offered through the Prison Yoga Project. San Quentin is not a substitute for any outside education and lifestyle but such programs

offer inmates semblances of normal life and true reformation opportunities.

This prison-giving-education model became famous at Robben Island prison in Cape Town. It was largely due to the efforts of prisoners like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu who took it upon themselves to transform the prison into a sort of university, a privilege available only to whites during South African apartheid.²³ At Robben Island, the prison became a symbol of freedom and liberation as its prisoners found education and literacy in its walls, something they could not find outside of them.

Clearly, the parallels between education and incarceration extend beyond San Quentin's walls. Prisons and educational facilities are surprisingly similar and comparing the two systems highlights society's lopsided values. Across the nation, with only 20 percent of inmates possessing a high school diploma and 75 percent illiterate at a 12th grade level, prisons show the focus of the criminal justice system on the poor and uneducated class.²⁴ Yet it is not the people but the misappropriated values and ensuing misallocation of funds that may be to blame. Looking at California, in 2006 the state spent \$8,000 on one student in the Oakland School District; by contrast, the state spent \$216,000 on one juvenile inmate.²⁵ California now spends more money on its prison system than the higher

education system, including the Universities of California and the California State Universities.²⁶ In 1980, at the start of the mass incarceration movement in America, two-thirds of the funds for public higher education came from the state budget; at present, that number is down to one-quarter.²⁷ As prisons close, reallocating funds back into education is the logical progression. It is as much about recognizing that prisons are obsolete as it is in re-examining educational and community values.



Fig. 14 The Last Mile Demo Day



Fig. 15 Prison Yoga Project



Fig. 16 Merchant of Venice production

These are just a few of the programs operating in San Quentin Prison, aimed at education and wellness for the current prisoners.

Identity | Diversity and the Bay Area

The Bay Area centers on San Francisco, California. It is the second densest region in the country and is lately known for its high cost of living and tech-rich job market. Yet the Bay Area also displays great diversity. The east and south sides of the bay currently house the more disadvantaged populations and the ones that are most affected by the criminal justice system and prison system. Communities of black and Latino populations are found in Oakland, Richmond and Alameda; currently, these populations coincide with low-level median household incomes as well as increased rates of incarceration. These communities were targeted by the criminal justice system and most affected by the mass incarceration movement.

San Quentin sits in Marin County, one of the wealthiest counties in the nation. In 2012, the Median Household Income (MHI) in Marin was \$90,535.²⁸ While it is certainly not the most homogeneous county, by California standards it is at 80% white.²⁹ By contrast, just six miles across the bay via the Richmond Bridge is the city of Richmond in Contra Costa County. In 2011, Richmond's MHI was \$51,652³⁰, or 57% of that of Marin. Even by California standards, Richmond is diverse at 40% Latino, 27% black, 17% non-Latino white, and 14% Asian.³¹

While these comparisons between Marin and Richmond are interesting based on their close proximity to each other, they are two populations separated by a prison. San Quentin Prison sits in Marin County but it is on the edge of the county, more of an eyesore and hindrance than anything that affects the people who live there. Yet just across the way, Richmond houses the population that is most affected by the prison system. Families from the East Bay regularly cross the bridge on Saturdays during public visiting hours; no similar trek is undertaken from Marin.

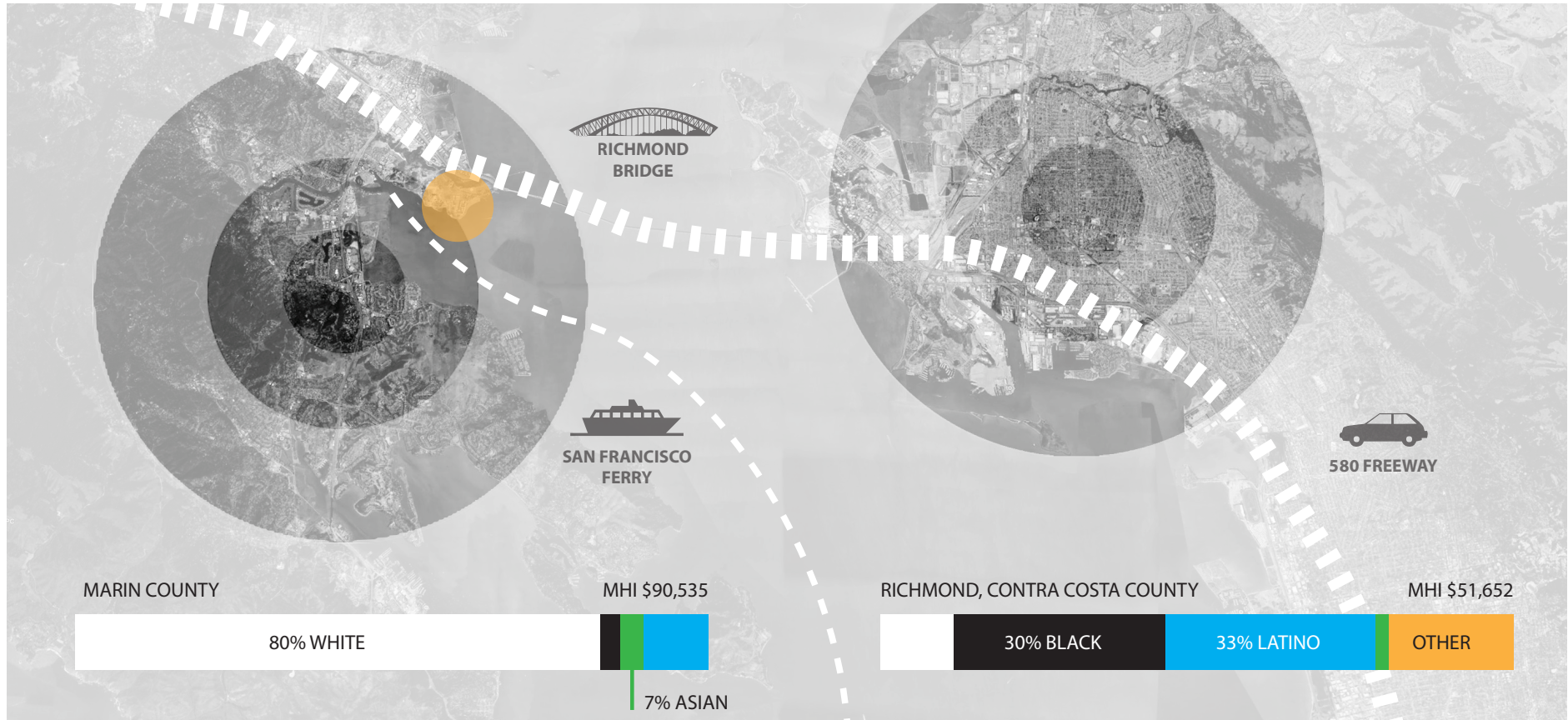
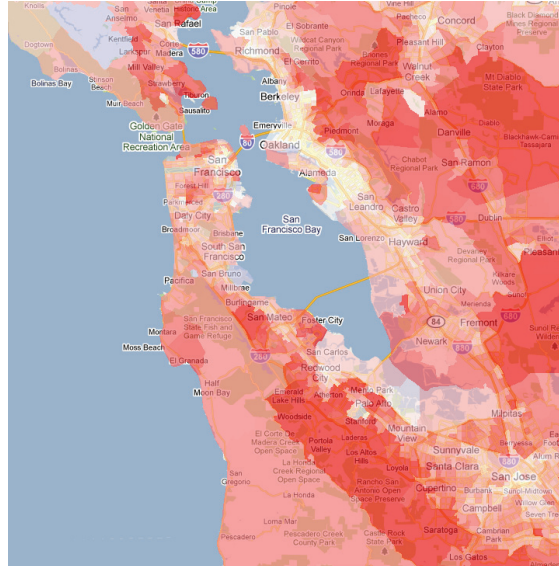


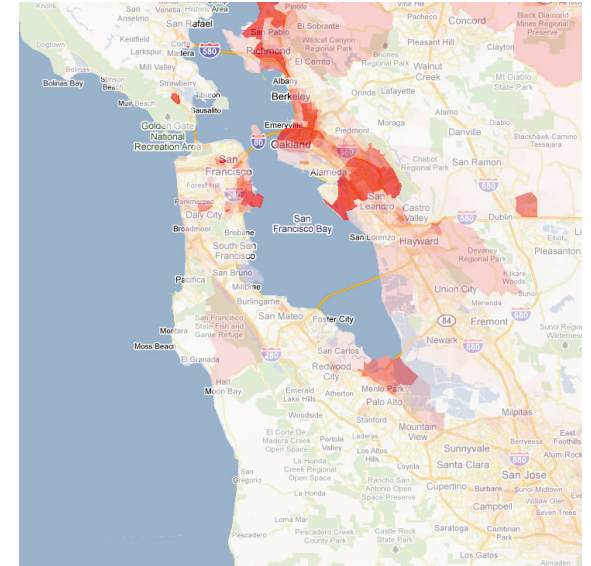
Fig. 17 Bay Divergence
 The north San Francisco Bay area is connected by six miles of the Richmond Bridge but its populations are separated by diversity, economics, and opportunity.

Fig. 18 Bay Area Demographics

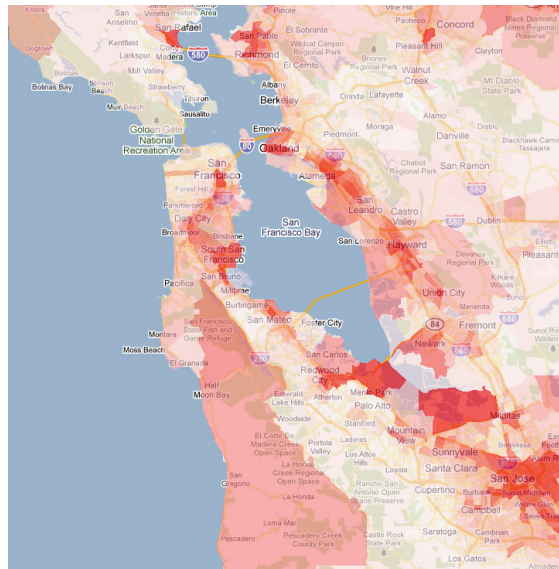
These maps show the great diversity present around the San Francisco Bay. They also diagram the correlation between minority populations in the urban Bay Area and low-income households. Low-income communities correlate to minority populations; these groups are at-risk for incarceration.



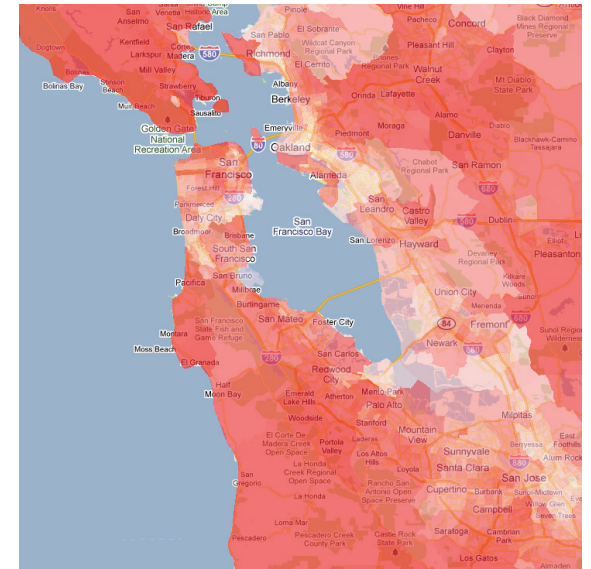
Median Household Incomes



Black Population Densities



Latino Population Densities



White Population Densities

Penitence | The Importance of Prison Adaptation

How can architecture change something like the prison system that is so ingrained in our society and culture? Architecture, boiled down, is a structure that houses people, whether they are at home, their job, or at a recreational event. It is within architecture that we live our lives. For prisoners, it is within their cells and within the prison walls that they live; that architecture is their reality. Yet in examining former prisons such as Robben Island Prison Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, the prison is not simply the walls: “Rather than classifying sites as prison buildings, housing, services, etc., it could be more useful to record the imprint of daily life of a prisoner on the landscape (the cell, the route to the quarry, the lunch area, the narrow view from a cell window) or the routine of life in the leper colony.”³² Given this, architecture has the power to reshape these memories and lives. The walls can reach out instead of contain; they can affect the same people that they harmed through the same prison walls, the same structure.

A prison is a way to punish people with architecture: “The building *is* the method. We put criminals in a locked room, inside a locked structure, and we leave them there for a specified period of time.”³³ These leftover shells of banishment have the capacity to serve as memorials

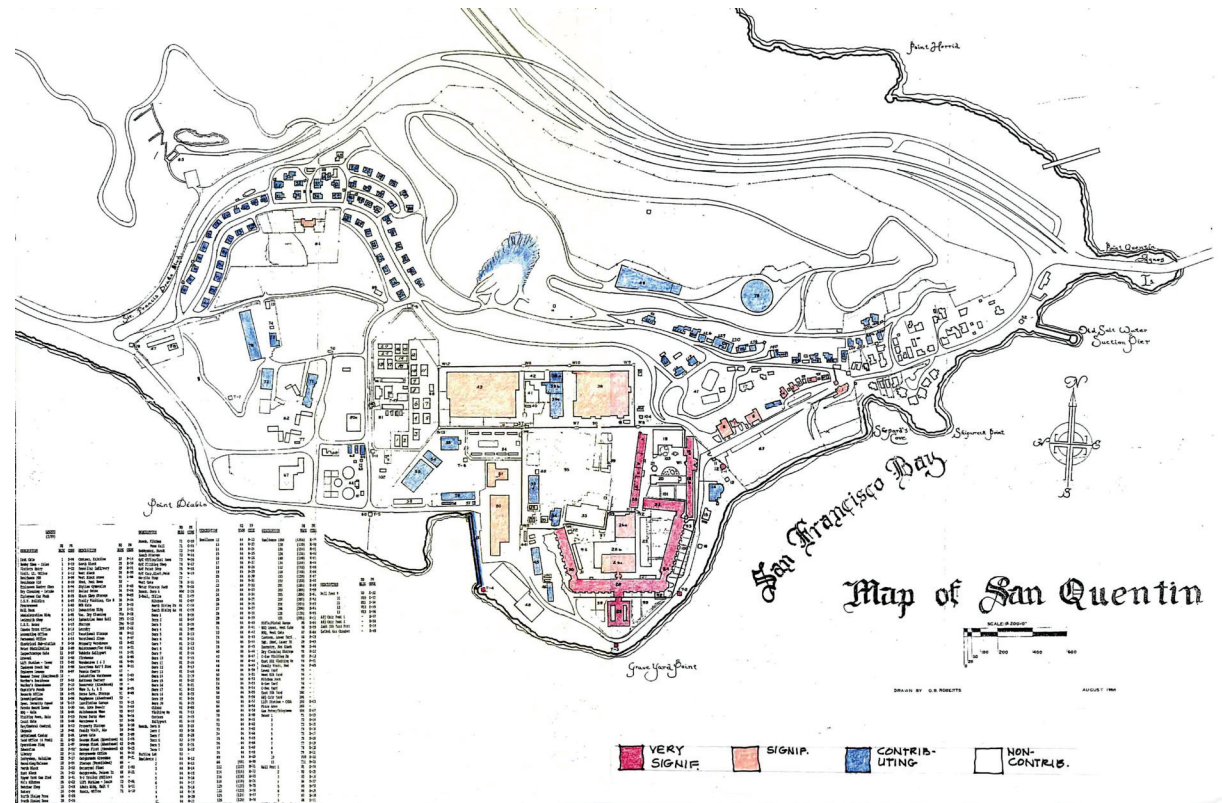


Fig. 19 Historic Map
This old map of San Quentin Prison was used to assign historical significance values to buildings on-site.

for the people who resided within them, people who were indeed victims of injustice, transforming prisons into places that remember the humanity of those within. Yet the most powerful memorial would reach out to the prison-affected populace.

While memorials are prevalent and visible in America, they often remember great wars or proud historical moments. On the other hand, the United States is not well practiced in creating memorials for events that we are ashamed of. Germany, on the other hand, has embraced their past and offered many memorials as atonement for World War II and the Holocaust. The recent “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” in Berlin is a large monument and museum. It is a city block full of concrete volumes that recall images of coffins. Like remnants of the Berlin Wall, it is a visible offering to atone for the past.

Perhaps the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” is too obvious. Transforming and reusing prison buildings can be similar to the stumbling stones in Berlin, an understated but expansive memorial to Holocaust victims. Brass tiles mark where people were taken from their homes, noting their name and dates of their lives. The stumbling stones bring individuality back to the people taken. America can learn something from Germany, to own up to its past. It is a memorial unlike those that currently existing in America.

Preserving the prisons as they become obsolete and converting their use gives honor to the people who lived inside the prison walls.



Fig. 20 Stumbling Stones

Brass plaques in Berlin mark where a person was taken during the Holocaust.



Fig. 21 Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

This haunting memorial in Berlin, though looming, does not remember individuals.

Vision | An Urban Design for San Quentin

With 432 acres of bay front property, Marin County developed the San Quentin Vision Plan. The plan outlines several key objectives: to create a walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented, European community design model; to promote the siting of well-designed, quality cultural facilities and higher education programs or institutions at the site; to respect on-site historical resources that tell the story of the prison's history; to encourage the creative re-use of historic structures in order to promote their preservation.³⁴ Even with the buildings sitting on the bay shoreline, the plan acknowledges the historic value of the early prison buildings on site. The plan makes the preservation of San Quentin's historic sector essential. Much of the site at San Quentin is not historic and can easily be developed into an urban center but these historic structures are to be preserved and repurposed.

As part of the San Quentin Vision Plan, Fisher and Hall Urban studied the site and developed a Conceptual Land Use Plan. Taking into account the opportunities and constraints on Point San Quentin, the Land Use Plan centers around a multi-modal transit hub. From here, new residential zones decrease in density toward the foothills. Green spaces such as parks and the surrounding

natural environment are paramount to this new urban village. Loosely sited are new educational and cultural facilities, specifically called for in the Vision Plan objectives.

In order to re-develop and re-use the San Quentin prison facility, this thesis proposes a new urban design for San Quentin's 432 acres. In keeping with Marin County's San Quentin Vision Plan, new streets and small city blocks are laid on the site to create a walkable neighborhood. New zoning proposes mixed-use commercial-residential, with medium-high density zones close to the shoreline, these zones decrease in density as the village expands out toward the foothills and existing low density residences.

The planned small blocks are essential for pedestrians. The new docks are an access point for the pedestrian ferry from San Francisco. People can come over for a day trip to enjoy hikes in the protected hills and beautiful views of the bay. Some may bring bikes to ride along the Marin Bay Trail—it is no longer closed to the public because of the prison and continues along the shore south to Larkspur and north to San Rafael. Small streets and alleys filter people into the village from the new transit hub and a prominent pedestrian arterial provides east-west access. Finally, parking is centered on the auto arterial that links the village to the Richmond Bridge and 580 Freeway, adding to

the diversity of transit opportunities.

Besides commercial and retail, small industry, fabrication workshops, and maker labs re-use and integrate San Quentin's existing industrial facilities. This new section of the village remembers what came before as well as making use of the prison's already well-equipped facilities. One of the industrial buildings is sited as a historic structure and is integrated into the re-use plan.

New cultural centers bring special events and activity to San Quentin Village, adding life at all times of the day. The waterfront performing arts center looks out over the stunning waterfront. A large facility, it has the capacity to bring in large performances, small theatre troops, and concert performances to Marin, a community that could surely support it. A new outdoor amphitheater and recreation center looks at to the Red Rocks Amphitheater as a model. Like Red Rocks, the San Quentin Park and Amphitheater is carved into the natural terrain and takes advantage of the hillsides outlook. Moreover, it is more than a concert venue but a place where people come throughout the day to hike in the park and exercise on the built-in amphitheater seating.

Finally, new educational facilities are the final anchor to the new urban village. A middle school and high school, located in the residential zone, support the village and surrounding San



Fig. 22 Conceptual Land Use Plan
Marin County's current vision of San Quentin as a Regional Transit Village, with the historic sector transformed into a public park and promenade. Image by Fisher and Hall Urban Design.

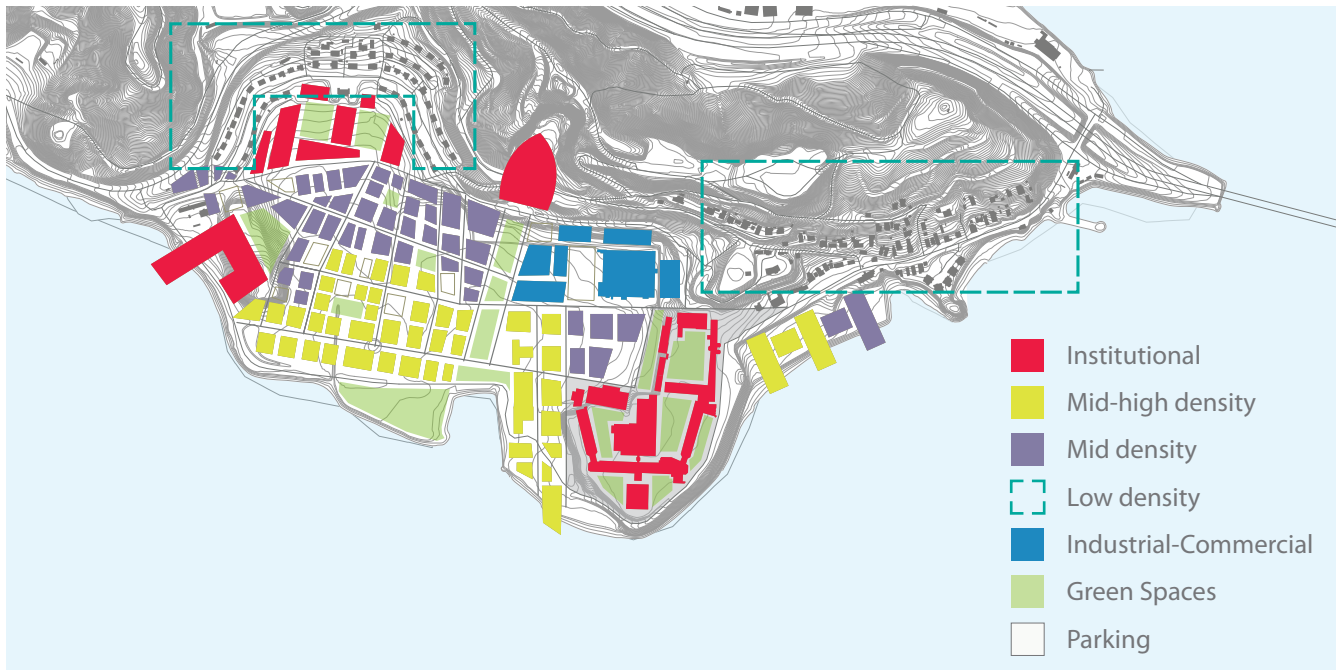


Fig. 23 New Zoning
 New urban, multi-use zones decrease in density as the new San Quentin village expands out from the shore.



Fig. 24 Connected Transit Systems
 Multiple transit systems converge to make a lively new community for visitors and residents.

Rafael and Larkspur communities. More importantly, the prison's historic structures are converted to a community college campus extension, connecting community colleges from Marin and Contra Costa counties. This realizes multiple objectives from the Vision Plan—creative reuse and adaptation of existing historic structures as well as emphasis on educational institutions. An educational development and cultural institution will attract quality growth and development in the burgeoning community.

The previous prison transforms into a transparent facility, no longer closed off to the world. Adding educational institutions creates a respectable and honourable use so that the new San Quentin serves as a sort of memorial to the United State's past criminal justice transgressions. Like the Berlin Wall and memorials in Berlin, Germany, or the Robben Island Prison Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, San Quentin achieves recognition and atonement. Instead of hiding the prisoners and the past, San Quentin owns up to it. Education is the key to atonement and freedom; as Ralph Ellison wrote in *Invisible Man*: "When I discover who I am, I'll be free." Taking cues from San Quentin's current programs and outreach, the community college extension continues the work for underserved populations that the prison system has most affected as well as serving as new bridge

between disparate communities. San Quentin's historic past and buildings transform into a beautiful and evocative campus.

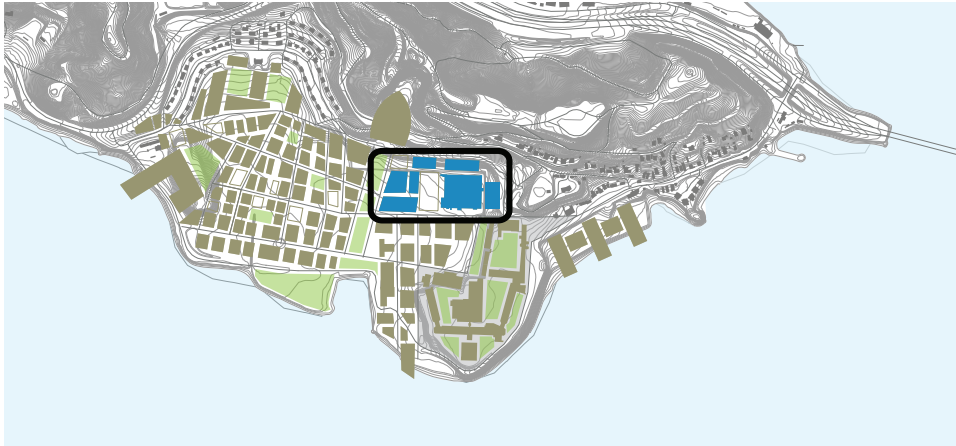


Fig. 25 Industrial Re-use

The existing fabrication sector of San Quentin is adapted in the new urban design, converted into a new maker-lab and commercial industry district.

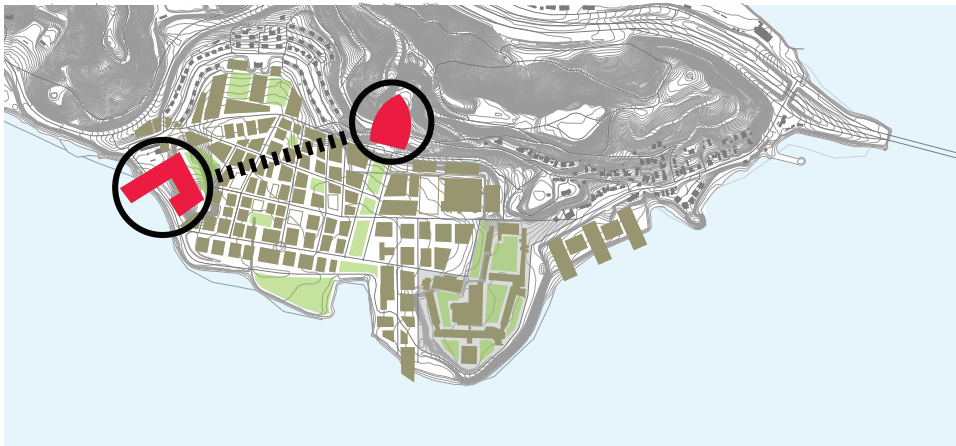


Fig. 26 Cultural Connections

The new cultural institutions cross the new village, creating pathways and nodes that activate the village at all times of day.



Fig. 27 Education Importance

Primary education is set into the residential zone; the existing historic structures on site are adapted into a new community college campus.



Fig. 28 San Quentin Campus
The existing prison layout is well-suited to a college campus.

Atonement | Community College as Education and Outreach

The conversion of San Quentin into a community college is financially feasible. Because land values and development would only increase in the Bay area, applying the Cooper Union model would fund an endowment for a similar education center. The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City owns the land under the Chrysler Building, creating an endowment for the university that subsidize the student's educational costs. With all of the land that the state and prison own in San Quentin, in addition to the reallocation of San Quentin's annual \$164 million budget, the community college can convert the prison structures within San Quentin's historic walls. To reiterate Maya Angelou, the prison that worked against people can now work for them.

Looking at the site plan of the historic structures, the prison campus could easily be mistaken for a college. The buildings are arranged in a courtyard formation, taking advantage of the outdoor space in California's mild and sunny climate. The community college extension serves both Marin and Contra Costa Counties, adding diversity to Marin and linking these contrasting districts. However, while a community college inherently serves lower class communities and

advances levels of education, the program at San Quentin Community College strives for more—further outreach to the community, further development of advanced education. With further outreach in mind, a part of the new campus will be dedicated to Design Education and Outreach.

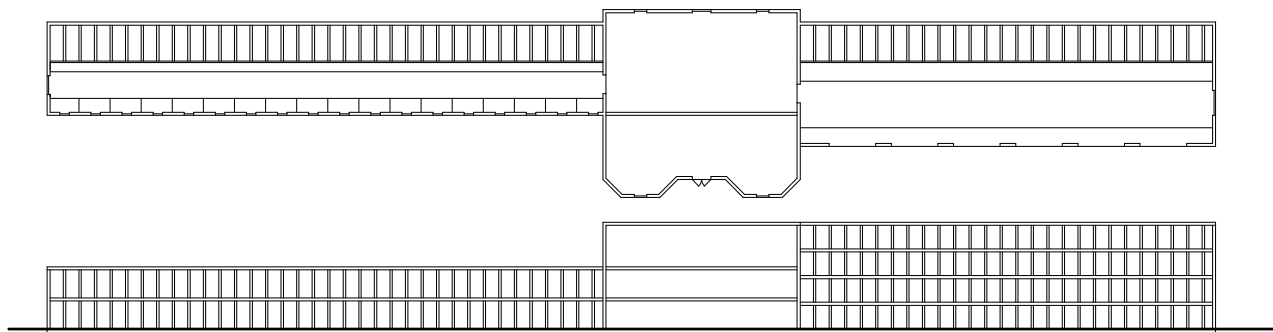


Fig. 29 Face of San Quentin

Building 19, with its central tower, is the entry to the prison and can be viewed from the entrance gate.

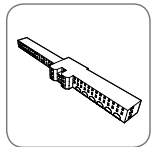
Fig. 30 The Auburn in San Quentin

The diagrammatic plan and section of Building 19 represents the dense nature of the cellblocks.

Outline | An Argument for Creative Education

The mission of Design Outreach Education (DOE) is to inspire youth, inspire creativity within them, and motivate them to pursue higher education. Recognizing that these students come from a public school system, their learning experience is typically segregated by subject matter and class periods. To differentiate and inspire creative thinking through education, DOE breaks out from the traditional public school model, combining the arts, sciences and new technologies in design education. Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman astronaut and doctor, art collector and dancer, elucidates the necessity of just such an education: “The creativity... that we are required to have to conceive and build and launch the space shuttle springs from the same source of imagination and analysis it took to carve a Boondo statue or the ingenuity it took to design, choreograph and stage Cry [a dance production]... The difference between science and the arts is not that they are different sides of the same coin, or even different parts of the same continuum, but rather, they are manifestations of the same thing. The arts and sciences are avatars of human creativity.”³⁵ Jemison argues to break down the barriers between science and art in education by using creative solutions in practical

settings. Design education gives students useful skills and prepares them for higher education. Moreover, the San Francisco Bay area is a perfect example of this melding of art and science. At San Quentin prison, the fabrication work for NASA satellites and the Last Mile tech start up program reference the growing creative and technological thinking and approach that infuses companies in the Bay Area. However, this type of thinking is not fostered in the current public school system. Ken Robinson, author and consultant on creative and cultural education, argues that the current state of education is lacking in terms of fostering creativity: “There isn’t an education system on the planet that teaches dance everyday to children the way we teach them mathematics. Why?”³⁶ Ken Robinson and Mae Jemison each identify the importance of science and art in education and how they should be valued equally. “Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.”³⁷



Prison Re-use



Visibility



Bridge



Community Outreach



Fig. 31 Program Goals

The DOE Center brings attention to the prison and the community that it affects, links these separated communities, and extends knowledge and design into those communities.

Spirit | The Proposed Education Outreach Program

The new Design Education Outreach (DOE) Center caters to high school students in diverse East Bay communities like those from Richmond, bringing them to San Quentin's DOE Center for extended (1-3 weeks) educational day camps. The program model is based on design outreach programs like the Rural Studio and Project M. These focus on students and young creatives to work on community interventions. They set up intensive workshops or "blitzes," short work periods to invent design solutions within specific communities. While programs like Project M are constantly changing location and community, DOE has a set location in San Quentin Community College as well as a set community of focus. The DOE Center preserves and adapts Building 19 of San Quentin. Serving as the new representation of San Quentin Community College, the DOE center replaces the old entrance and face of the prison.

During the school year, public schools from the area, with a focus on schools in at-risk and prison-affected neighborhoods, send students to DOE workshops at the new center. The DOE center serves basic needs of an urban education camp. This new creative classroom model is not just a single classroom but necessitates a variety of

spaces for multiple modes of work and interaction. A variety of large, communal spaces—digital labs, resource center, lounges, and galleries—encourage work in large groups and across groups; they additionally interact with visitors to the DOE Center as public galleries or event halls. Three large labs serve as classrooms; they are dedicated spaces for groups of up to 18 students to work on their design project. Three small labs are satellites to each large lab space—large groups can break apart into small groups, working in dedicated spaces and a quieter, cozier atmosphere. Finally, small study carrels throughout the building suit for private work and study, to get away from the hectic group environments. The group project spaces and individual studio-lab rooms are multi-functional areas that can be adapted for a range of activities from studying to lectures to gallery display to event spaces.

The new facility is a site for students to enact their own projects. They are supported by their schools but the DOE guides students as they develop their own projects—interventions and experiments for their own community or neighborhood. The DOE Center is a dedicated creative workspace for up to three student groups at a time. Again, the goal is not to separate disciplines but to combine them, fostering creativity because the students interact, share ideas and

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.
Nelson Mandela

are free to pursue their own ideas. This design education better prepares students for secondary education, breaking away from traditional models and turning their own education over to the students.



Fig. 32 Design Outreach Education Program

Large communal spaces
Digital Lab
Resource Library

Large group work labs
Classrooms

Small group work labs
Private work space

Circulation
Gallery + Cafe + Entry Lobby
Back-of-house



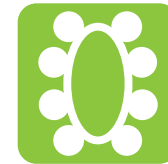
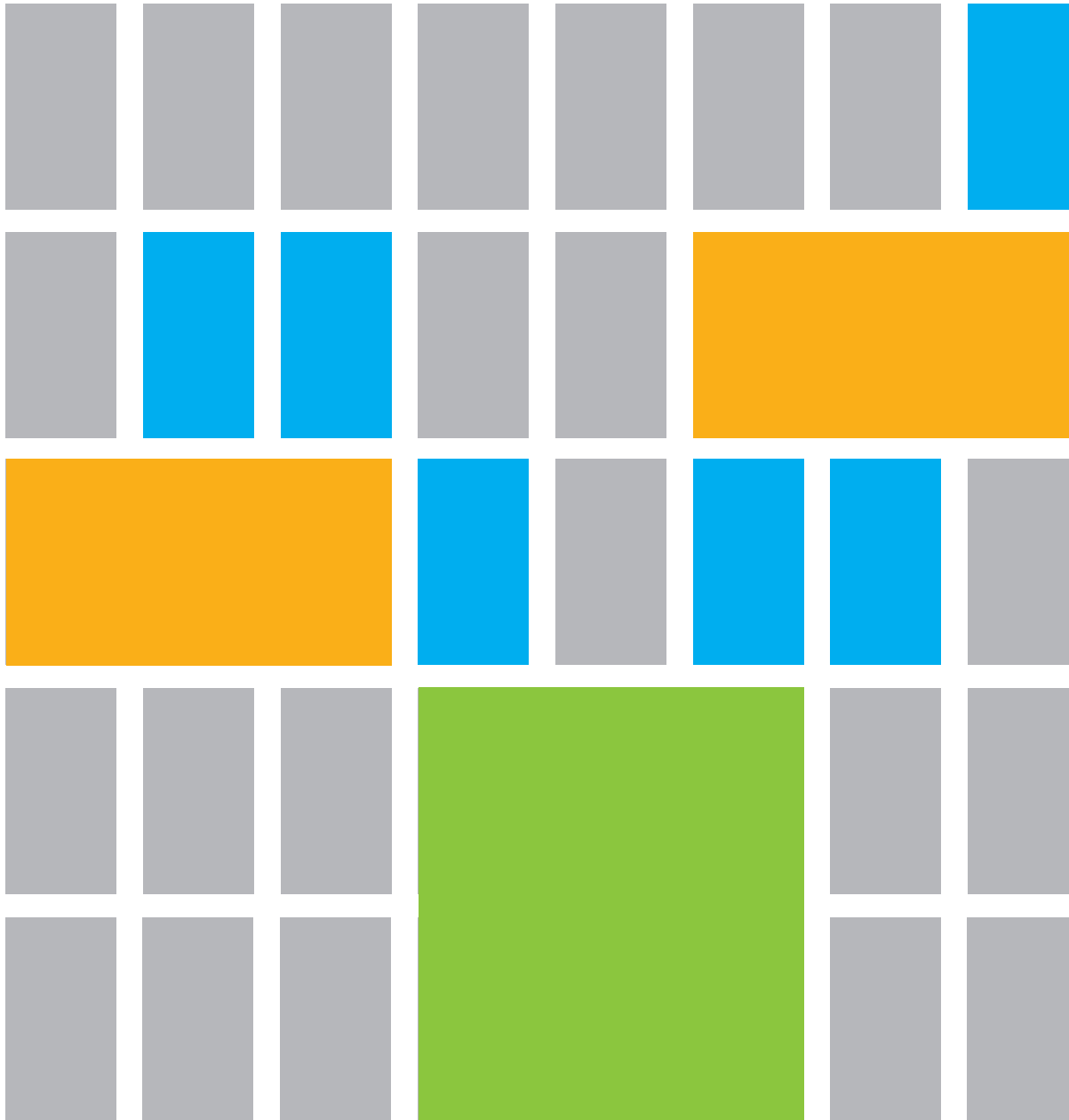
Fig. 33 The Rural Studio

Youth, design, and construction in disadvantaged neighborhoods are all essential elements to the Rural Studio's design outreach.

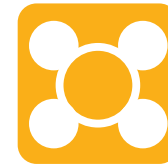


Fig. 34 Project M

This design group assess a community before inserting various design interventions.



Large, communal spaces encourage work across groups while spreading out past their boundaries and activating adjacent spaces.



Large labs or classrooms are dedicated group work spaces for up to 20 students. These spaces remain flexible and light to support the student-led projects.



Three small labs are satellites for each large lab, allowing the student groups to divide and work in small teams as needed. They also provide quieter work spaces.

Fig. 35 Programmatic Grid

This diagram represents the rigid grid system and how the various program elements must break apart the existing cell grid.



Fig. 36 A New Face
The new DOE wing conveys an openness contrary to the old prison facade.

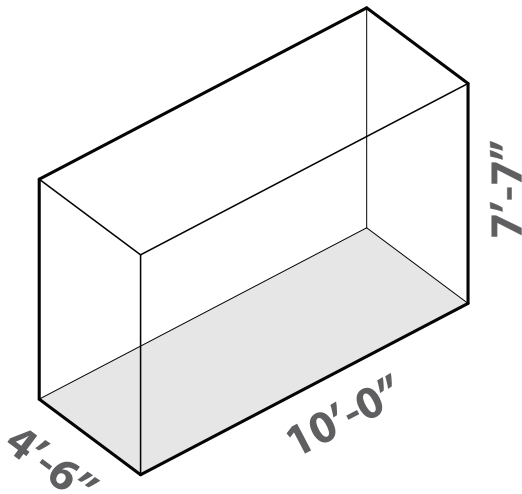


Fig. 37 San Quentin Cell
The average dimensions of a cell at San Quentin

Architecture | Adapting a Rigid Prison Structure

The main issue in adapting Building 19 into the Design Education Outreach Center is modifying an unyielding structure like a prison into a flexible education center—a rigid grid is difficult to mesh with a creative and flexible design-oriented learning center. The main prison components of the cellblock wing—like those of the Auburn system and found in San Quentin—are the cell, the cellblock, and the atrium. These spaces work on multiple scales: the cell encompasses the individual inmate; the cellblock holds the prison populace; and the atrium is the guard's realm, where they monitor or transport the inmates. The typical cell size at San Quentin is 4'-6" wide, 10' long, and 7'-7" in height.^{38 39} The cells arranged on the west wall form the cellblock, a regular and extremely dense formation. Finally, the atrium encompasses the balcony corridors as well as surveillance platforms, controlling and watching the inmates.

The grid is the predominant structure and becomes symbolic of the cellblock. It also guides the layout of the new interventions. Key sections of the grid structure are preserved and reinforced. These walls are a concrete frame system with masonry infill. The reinforced walls extend from floor to ceiling to form a solid base structure to support the existing structure, new structure, and



Fig. 38 Existing Cellblock
A photograph of one of San Quentin's cellblocks.



Fig. 39 Cell Interiors
The extremely small size in a San Quentin Cell barely fits a bunked bed and its inmates.

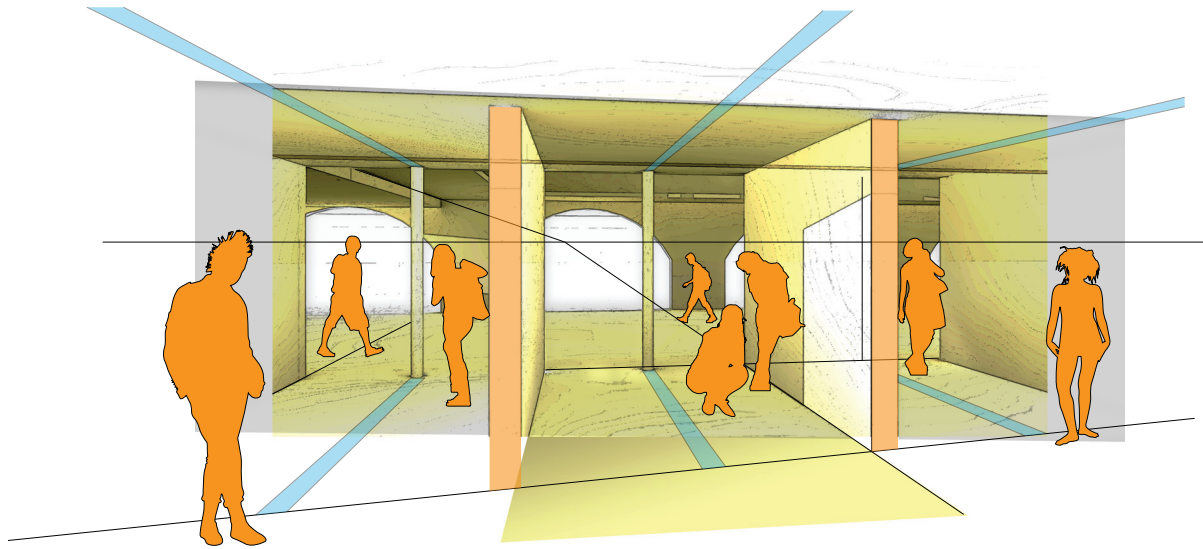


Fig. 40 Cell Strategy

Where the cells are retained, elements of the removed cell walls are preserved through their imprint left on the walls and floor of the preserved structure.

lateral seismic bracing. The parts of the grid that are removed are where the new program boxes are inserted. The majority of the masonry infill is removed, exposing the concrete columns and beams while leaving the imprint of the cells. What is left is the bare grid structure, revealing the cellblock wall and forming inviting new spaces. These new program interventions—large communal spaces, large labs, and small labs—align with the grid and are inserted into the new, reinforced grid structure. Their lightweight metal stud framing and painted steel skin contrast to the existing worn concrete of the cellblock.

On the ground level of the atrium, the new communal lounge and resource center spills out on the atrium floor and into the rear courtyard. This student lounge activates each of these larger spaces and bridges the interior with the exterior. Because it is large and shared, it centralizes crowd interactions on the atrium floor.

The large labs spread out in the grid to the second level or the edge of the first level. These flexible classrooms are spacious and interactive but less so than the communal spaces. Their purpose is not to spread activity to other spaces but to condense group activity and work. They are large and amorphous; they contain large tables used as group work surfaces, excellent condensers for students to collaborate or learn in a classroom

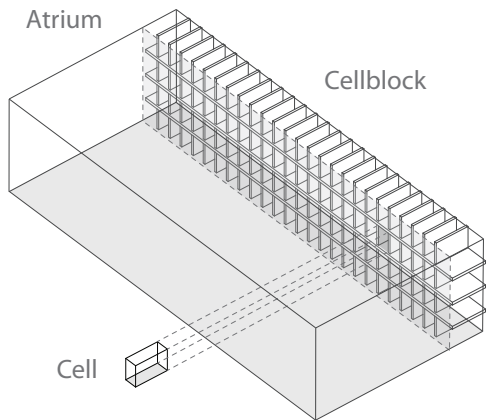


Fig. 41 Prison Elements
The cell, the cellblock, and the atrium are the essential parts of the structure.

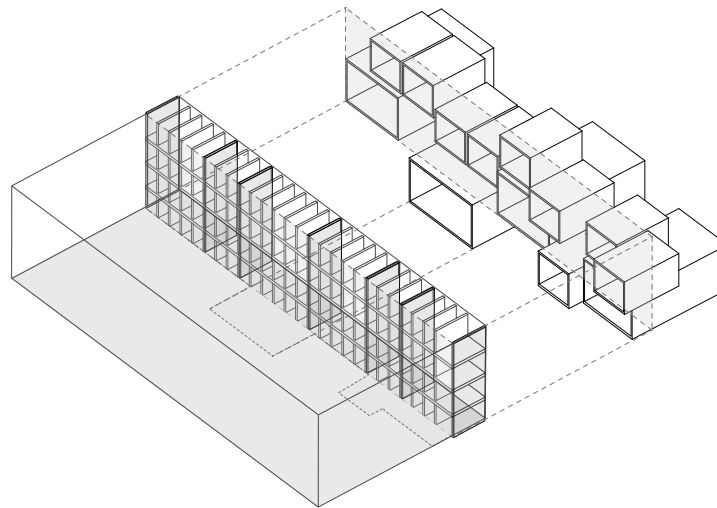


Fig. 42 Preserved Structure
Parts of the grid are preserved and reinforced to support new programmatic insertions.

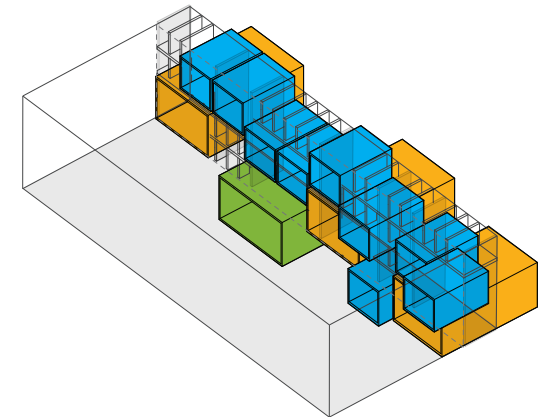


Fig. 43 Inserted Program
The new program elements are organized and inserted into the reinforced grid.

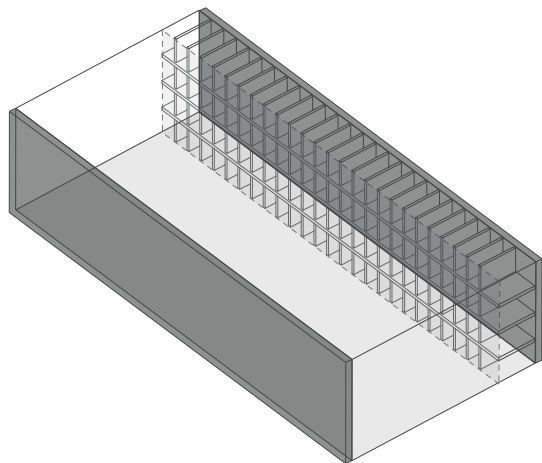


Fig. 44 Opaque Walls
The prison's dense walls prevent views into and out of the prison.

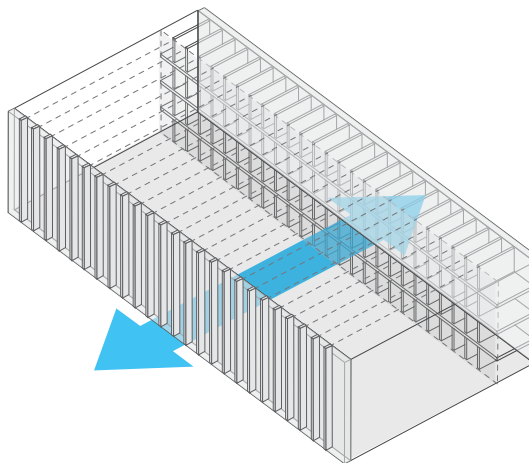


Fig. 45 Transparent/Apparent
The walls transform: the grid stretches to the face and filters new pathways through the walls.

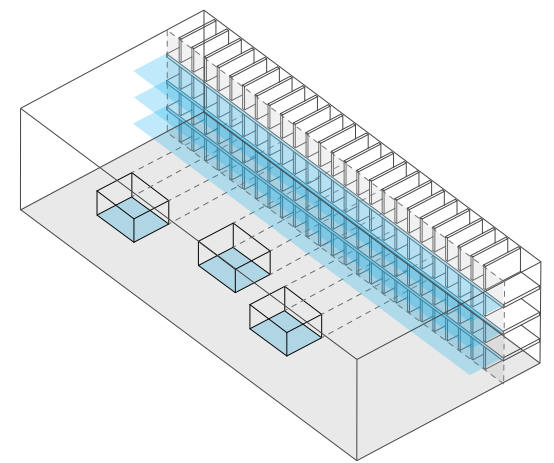


Fig. 46 Atrium Transformed
The atrium promotes movement, with walkways and study carrels projecting into the space.



Fig. 47 Communal Lounge Insertion

The lounge accesses the atrium floor and serves as a bridge between atrium and rear courtyard.

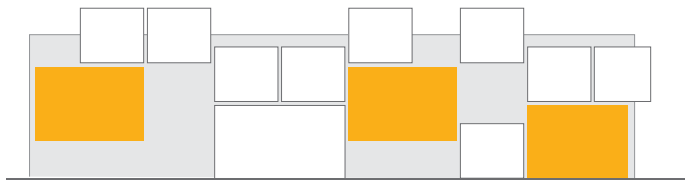
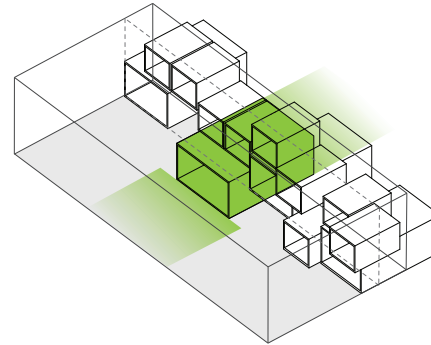


Fig. 48 Large Lab Insertions

The large labs are close to but not touching the public or communal spaces.

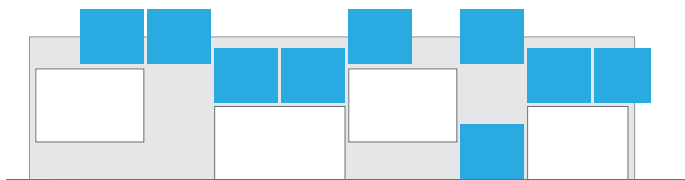
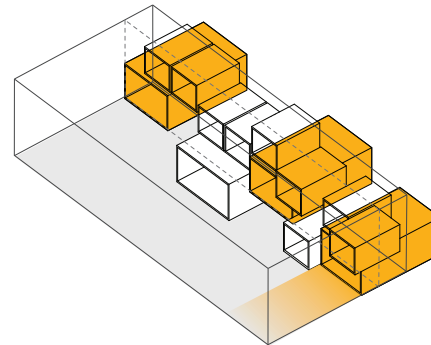
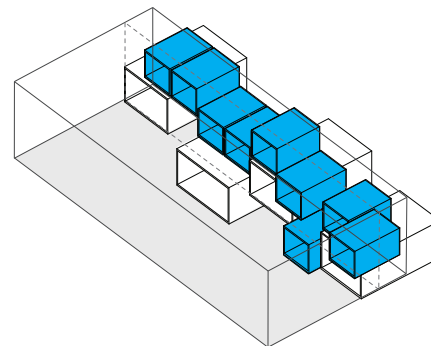


Fig. 49 Small Lab Insertions

These are removed from busy communal areas to provide quiet meeting rooms for small groups.



environment. The tables are a special element in the space. They are 4'-6" by 10'-0", the interior dimension of the cells in San Quentin. These work areas are remnants of the cells. Small for a living space, they are appropriately sized for design collaboration.

The small labs are pushed to the grid periphery. They are quieter, located in the upper levels, away from the active communal or public spaces. Private study carrels for one to two students are pulled out like drawers away from the grid. They provide the best vantage for breathtaking views over the San Francisco Bay and add layers of visibility between the learning spaces and the outside. Moreover, they float above the atrium court, raised towers looking onto the public square; their overhead structure further provides unique opportunities for design display to activate the atrium court as a gallery display.

Additional study carrels re-make the cells that are preserved in the cellblock. They are opened up with large windows, looking into the campus courtyard. These intimate study rooms remember the cell and their small size, retaining the low-ceiling and the cell's concrete frame. The removed walls are apparent, their absence drawn onto the floor and ceiling. While these cell-study carrels are more open and have views and natural light, they allow visitors and students to step into the life of former



Fig. 50 Small Lab Interior
These look out on the atrium and bay at an elevated position, opening the cellblock up to view they never had before.

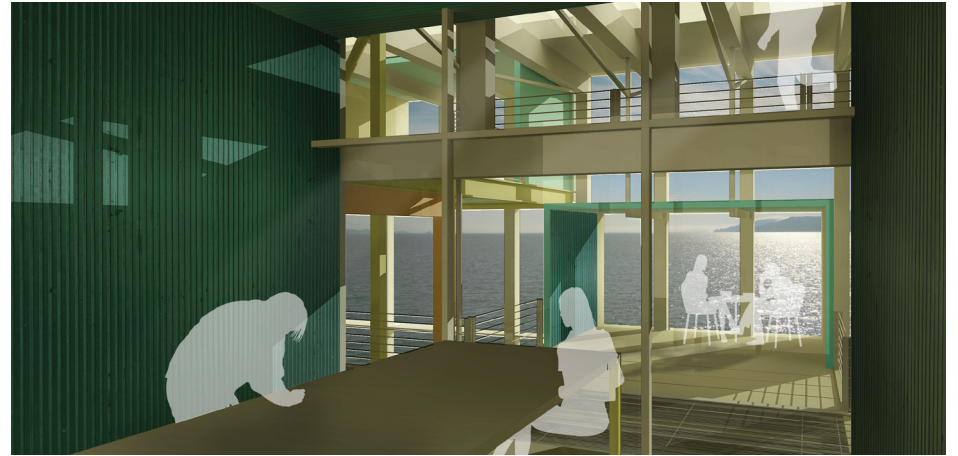


Fig. 51 Large Lab Interior
These large classrooms can accommodate groups of up to 18 to 20 students. They are flexible in order to suit the needs of each new design group.



Fig. 52 Lounge Interior
An extension from the walkway references the old cellblock, with the low ceiling compressing the visitor and opening as the lounge reaches out to the western courtyard.





inmates. Importantly, these spaces transcend, transformed into a reflective place for study which still exists on the individual scale. They are haunting, tangible and transformed reminders of what came before while being integrated into the new school.

The core functions of the building and more public aspects of the program are housed in the tower. An entry café, administration desk and seating area greet visitor upon entering the DOE Center. On each floor, the public restrooms, storage, and custodial rooms are held in the same location, making the building easy to navigate for visitors and students.

On each level, the plans illustrate how the program interventions inserted into the cellblock grid interact with the atrium space. The atrium connects all the new program spaces—from the student lounge to the small study carrels. Each looks out on and connects to the tall, narrow atrium. Furthermore, the public nature of the spaces decrease with each rising level, another intuitive navigation for users and visitors. At the higher private, studious levels, the small study carrels appear, sliding out from the grid in forceful moves. Though they are reserved for private work, they are one of the more dynamic interventions in the adapted system. On the third level, the communal element re-emerges in the tower, locating group movements and work that disperses



Fig. 53 Detail of the West Facade
 (Opposite page) The new gallery is a hollowed out section of the old cellblock, framed by the new structure inserted into the grid.

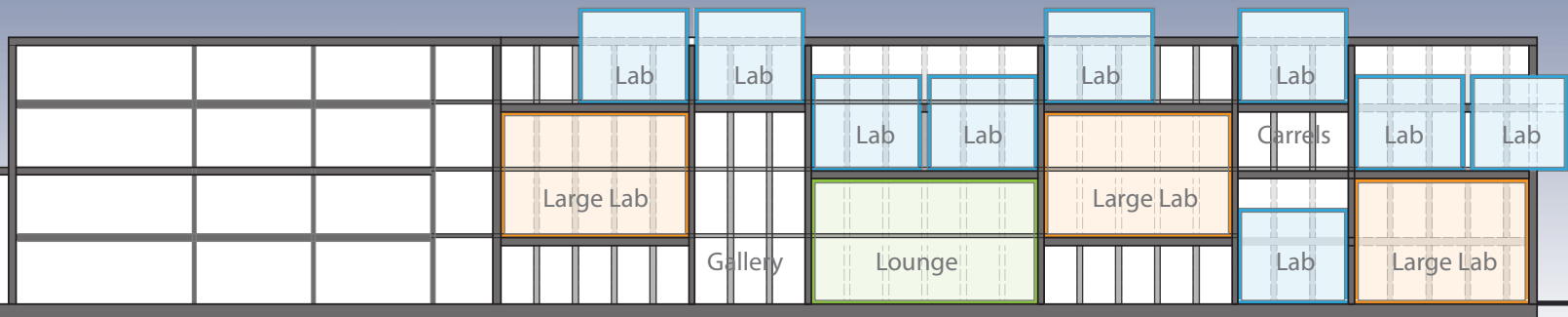


Fig. 54 Longitudinal Section
 (Above) The grid combines with the new structure, atrium, and student labs; the stairs and lateral bracing hover in the airy atrium while the new program spaces look out on and connect to the atrium.

Fig. 55 Diagrammatic Section
 (Below) The grid is preserved by retaining structural columns and beams; the grid is now a ghost of the former cellblock, still present and haunting.

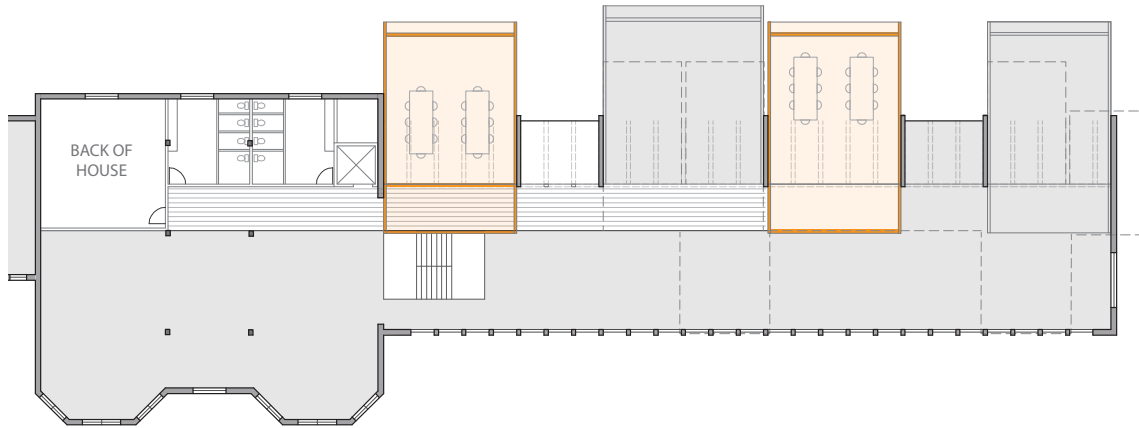


Fig. 56 Level Two Plan

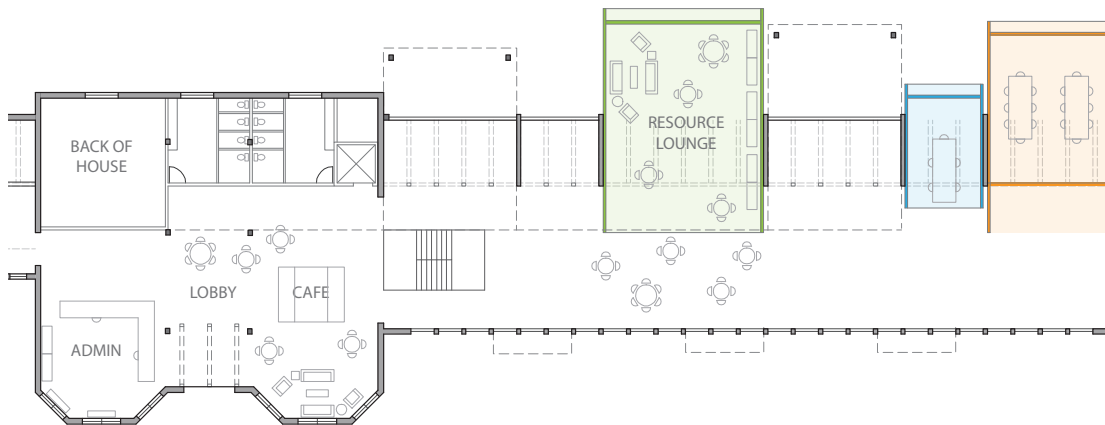


Fig. 57 Level One Plan

into the grid through the atrium. However, this is not a public space but a digital lab reserved for the students, hence its removal from the public and open atrium or tower lobby on the first level.

The visibility of the cellblock grid holds the memory of the prison. The existing grid structure is maintained with columns or beams, though the masonry infill may have been removed. In the diagrammatic section, the retained sheer walls for structure are shown, stretching from the ground level to the roof. Parts of the concrete floor system are also maintained, supporting the new program spaces. At the faces of the retained cells, converted into galleries or study carrels, the structural grid is maintained with the existing columns and floor. The structural frame of the cell is preserved, creating an open, usable space and fusing with the memory of the cell.

Integrating transparency into the converted prison is another key design strategy. Prisons are solid, enclosed buildings, built to keep views out as much as to keep them within. Transforming the walls, while leaving semblances of them, is similar in how the grid is retained—it is now a ghost, visible but transparent. The grid projects out from the cellblock, transferring columns to the façade. The impenetrable wall is removed and the grid is defined on the building's face. New approaches on both sides of the former cellblock wing permits

lateral movement, filtering through the cellblock and providing new access. The stairs rise up in the atrium so that users can physically inhabit this grand connecting space, a space previously closed off to the residents of San Quentin Prison. It is an additional form of movement, crossing the previous limits vertically. This is new access brought to the building, countering the formerly controlled pathways moving along the grid. Additionally, transparency is a necessary component of a school. While there are secluded study carrels, they still open out onto the atrium. There are not any truly hidden or private spaces. Ironically, this transparency makes it easy to monitor the high school students brought into the DOE Center, necessary in any primary education building.

Finally, when adapting San Quentin Prison, transformation takes on new meaning. The architecture and program transform the meaning and function of the existing spaces, redefining them through light, movement, access, and structure. As part of the prison program, the atrium enabled control and surveillance of the inmates. Michael Foucault explains the nature of prison architecture in his work *Discipline and Punish*: “A whole problematic then develops; that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen, or to observe the external space, but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control— to

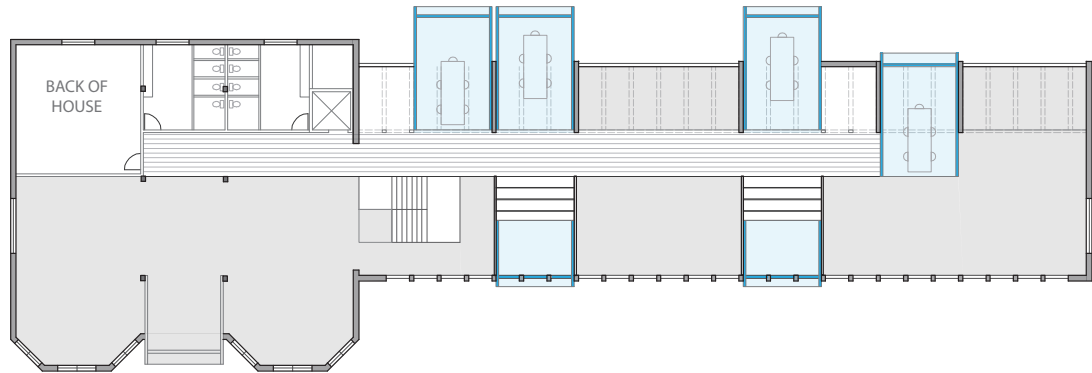


Fig. 58 Level Four Plan

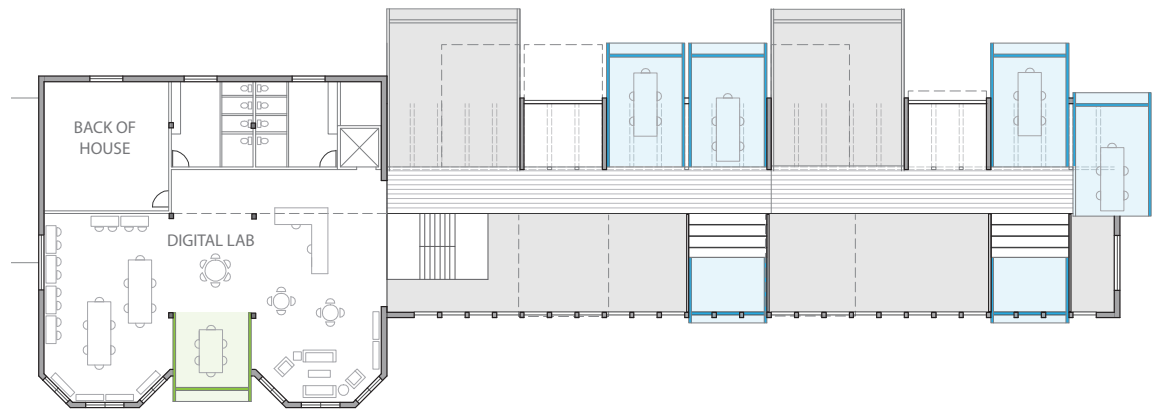


Fig. 59 Level Three Plan





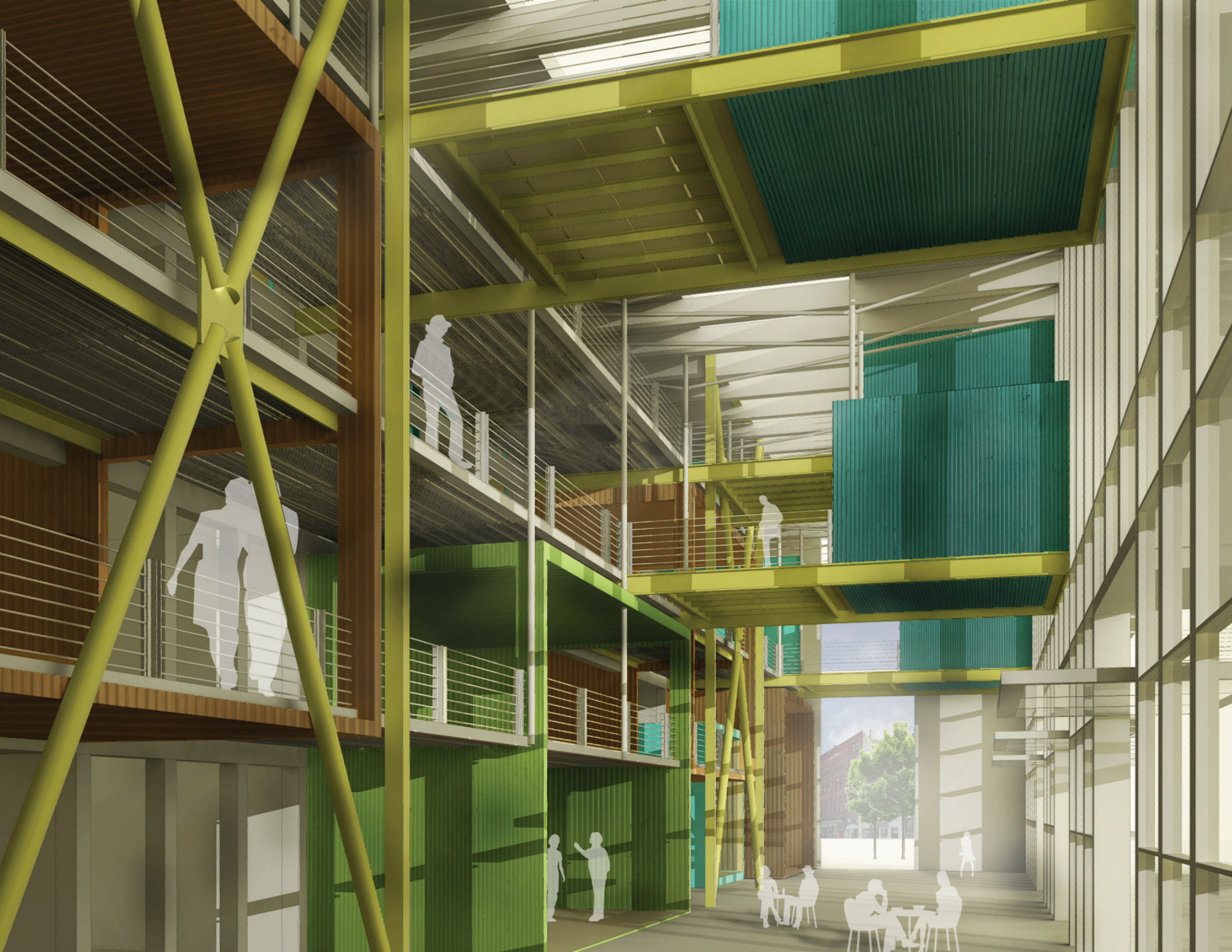
render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals.” The atrium controls the inmates through unrestricted visibility, limiting privacy within the walls. In a prison, the spaces change the people within by controlling every aspect of their lives. The new Design Outreach Education program seeks to transform as well, but not through control but through creativity and collaboration. The atrium is transformed into that, housing circulation along the grid and through the grid by people and spaces. The atrium circulates light and air into the cellblock with new skylights and operable windows on its faces. The expansive space opens up to the former cellblock to take advantage of views of the bay, something that was previously denied to San Quentin inmates. Like the atrium, the cells, the cellblock and the walls are all transformed in their meaning, materiality and use. The former prison structure now exists as the structural skeleton, supporting the new programmatic spaces and advanced education for San Quentin’s new student body.

Fig. 60 The New School and the Night

(Left) The new DOE Center glows from within, a beacon on the new campus.

Fig. 61 Transformed Atrium

(Opposite Page) The sliding study carrels float in the open and light atrium, full of gathering and activity.



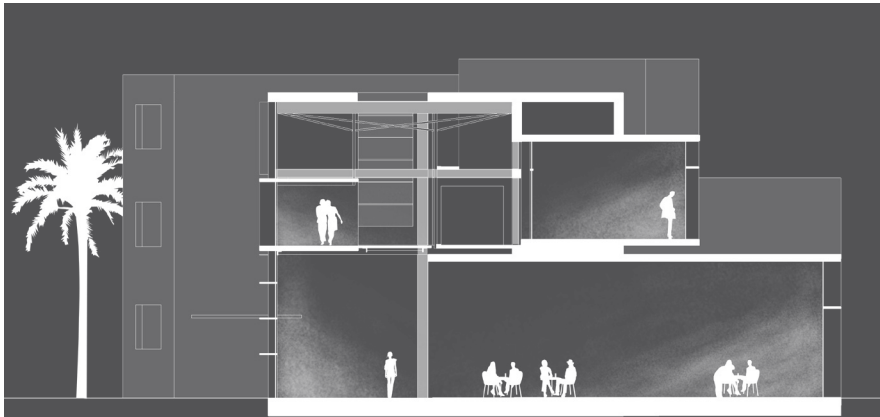


Fig. 62 Lab Section

The various labs and study carrels connect to the atrium.

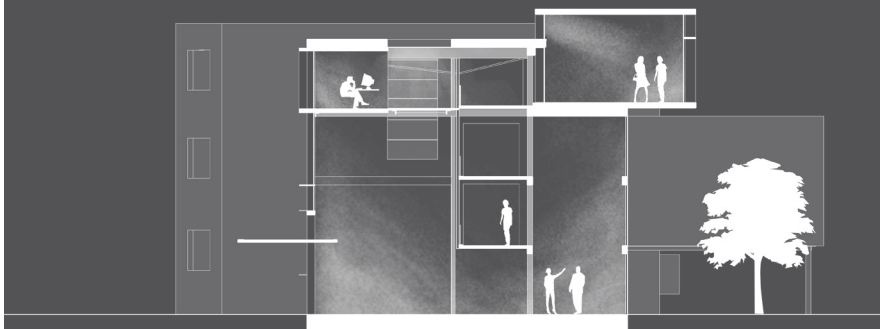


Fig. 63 Gallery Section

The atrium is a group of cells, carving out a towering gallery space.

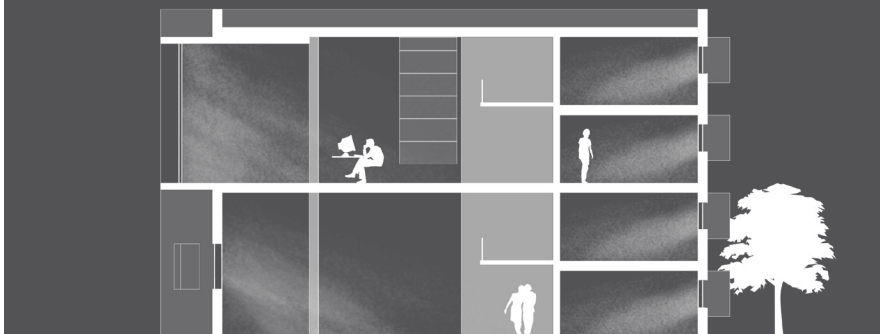


Fig. 63 Tower Section

The Tower is composed of two double-height communal spaces with the building core connected to and following the former cell block floor levels.

Visible | Conclusions and Projections

While this thesis took on a very current problem in society, architecturally the prison was symbolized through the grid. The project tried to break that grid, changing the inflexible into a flexible architecture. While this is an experimental system that could be applied or experimented with in similar structures, the importance of prison adaptation is spatial transformation. Each space in the prison takes on new meaning and that is the heart of this argument. Moreover, adaptation retains memory for the sake of the people who were affected by the prison system—inmates, friends, families, and communities. San Quentin is a unique case. Its access to dense urban centers and historicism make an easy argument for conversion, and one that already exists. Its visible location on the waterfront makes it a landmark for prison conversion and a new outlook on America's incarceration system.

But what about the remaining existing prisons? In California, the majority of the prisons are removed from cities. Even rethinking the location of current prisons, moving them from rural locations and into urban settings would do more for prisoners: “[C]onvicts tend to come from cities; guards do not. Culture clashes inevitably arise. Skilled labour—doctors, psychologists and

the like—is harder to find in rural areas, and so are the volunteers who work in the many rehabilitation programs. The families of working-class and poor convicts often can't afford to travel a few hundred miles to visit their relatives. As a result, prisoners have a harder time maintaining ties with the lives they left behind.”⁴⁰ While there are steps being taken to make prisons more humane, the real advance is through social measures, diverting incarceration away from targeted groups. Learning to adapt these massive campuses as they become obsolete is necessary as American society moves away from mass incarceration. Other prison complexes can be similarly converted, but through different programs adapted to their location. Rural prisons would be ideal sites for agriculture centers, as they are already located in California's central valley and main agricultural center of the United States. Other rural centers can be adapted into data centers, well suited for removed and highly protected locations. Nevertheless, education and remembrance should still be a part of these adaptations, recalling lessons from Berlin.

While not every prison complex will respond in the same way, the San Quentin facility would act as a flagship and memorial. In this vein, the new San Quentin program takes into account the people that have been affected by the prison system—people that were ignored or oppressed.

An educational institution within the historic section upholds San Quentin as a tribute to the incarcerated class.

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