



In 1912, Douglas Stewart became the warden at the St. Vincent De Paul Penitentiary in Laval, Quebec, and began to overhaul its disciplinary system. Prior to his tenure, imprisoned people who broke the rules had been lashed with a cat o' nine tails, which was a standard punishment of the day. But Stewart wanted something stronger, and replaced the cat with "hosing." Guards would blast people with cold water until they asked for mercy. He was satisfied with the results.

"It takes the defiance out of them," Stewart explained to investigators from a [government commission](#) on penitentiaries. "Men will surrender under this who will not under any other punishment."

Canada's politicians were horrified. Hosing was abolished [in 1913](#), adding to a growing list of forbidden punishments. By then, prison administrators had already been barred from locking people inside a "coffin-like" box, or forcing them to wear a 28-pound steel boot. Ending hosing was only the latest reform to dull the sharp edge of the country's prisons.

The politicians were quick to note that they still supported the logic of punishment. The government put people in prison to make them suffer, and people who misbehaved in prison had to suffer even more. The level of that suffering was the only part up for debate.

EVEN IF SOLITARY IS ELIMINATED, HISTORY SUGGESTS THAT PUNISHMENT AND HUMANITY ARE FUNDAMENTALLY INCOMPATIBLE.